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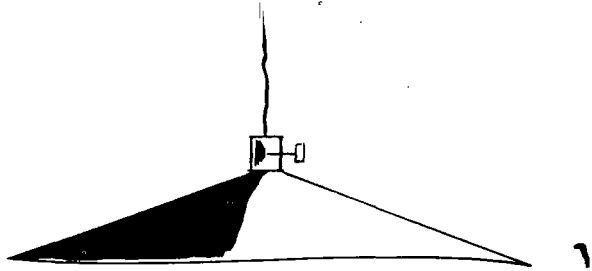

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THE GHOST OF A GHOST

by MICHAEL INNES

TEA HAD BEGUN WHILE A PALE sunshine still sifted through the garden, and animation continued to be lent to the wintry scene by a group of children tirelessly tobogganing on the slopes beyond the village. But now, although the curtains had been drawn a full hour ago, our hostess's tea equipage continued to hold its ground, with the firelight playing agreeably upon its miscellaneous china and silver. The Bishop was the cause of its lingering. His interest in the handsome Georgian pot was not merely esthetic, for he continued to claim cup after cup with a pertinacity that would have done credit to Dr. Johnson himself. And in the process — but this may have been only my fancy — his complexion changed slowly from ruddy to purple, as if he were bent on achieving a tint harmonious with the resplendent garments into which he would presently change for the purpose of transacting the serious business of the day.

Yet this business — both dinner itself and our leisurely preparations for it — hovered still some time off, and it was possible to feel that a mildly empty interval confronted us. To attend, each of us, to our personal affairs would have been entirely natural at so informal an hour; but in an unpretentious country house, little frequented by the great, an ecclesiastical dignitary is a person of consequence, and it was obvious that our hostess wished to avoid a mere breaking apart and drifting away, at least until the episcopal teacup had been definitively laid aside. And this was the exigency in which the young woman called Lady Appleby — the wife of an unobtrusive person who had been introduced to me as some kind of Assistant or Deputy Commissioner at Scotland Yard — produced her competition. She produced, that is to say, a weekly paper of the sixpenny species which she had evidently been turning over earlier in the day, together with the proposal that we should collectively endeavor to win the comfortable sum of three guineas.

Our hostess was enchanted — as it was her business to be. "Judith, what a wonderful idea! But is it a *good* competition? I hate the stodgy ones — composing sonnets and villanelles. Is it last words? I do adore making up last words for people. Bishop, have you ever tried?"

"Not, dear lady, precisely in the sense we are considering." The Bishop rose and moved implacably forward with his cup. "But I make no objection to the pastime — provided it is

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not massively exploited for purposes of edification, that is to say. . . . Thank you — two lumps."

"There was such a good one only a few weeks ago. Attributed to King Charles II — or was it King Charles I? That he must apologize for being such a long time in dying."

"Most felicitous." The Bishop offered this comment with gravity, and then turned to Lady Appleby. "But *is* it last words?"

"Not last words — just words. Three enigmatical remarks, accidentally overheard. Elucidations are not required."

There was a pause on this, and I was myself the first person prompted to speak. "I think I can supply one straight away. I was once called up on the telephone, rather late at night, by a man's voice announcing, in considerable agitation, that Queen Anne was dead. But he had got the wrong number, and rang off. I never knew what it was about."

I cannot claim that my little anecdote was a great success. Somebody at once pointed out that the truly enigmatical was lacking to it, since what I had accidentally received was plainly urgent intelligence from a kennel or a stable. Oddly enough, this had never occurred to me, and I have to confess that I was a little discomfited. The Bishop I think observed this, and charitably took up the ball.

"There are undoubtedly some snatches of talk which will recur to one teasingly for years. Some of you perhaps knew Charles Whitewell, who was reckoned a barrister of rare promise before his tragic death? We belonged to the same club, and on the occasion which I am recalling I happened to pass close to him in the dining room when he was entertaining a guest — someone quite unknown to me. And I heard Whitewell utter just four words. I believe they might qualify very well for Lady Appleby's competition. They were these: 'Grey's ghost was black.'"

There was a moment's silence while we absorbed this — and then our hostess reacted with characteristic dash. "But, my dear Bishop, how marvelously odd! Grey's ghost was black! Did you ever find out what it meant?"

"Never. I had it in mind, indeed, to ask Whitewell one day. I knew him quite well enough to do so. But then, of course, he was killed in the Alps. His guest I never saw again — nor could I very well have tackled him if I had. So there it is: Grey's ghost was black."

"I think it had something to do with heredity." Lady Appleby offered this odd opinion with every appearance of confidence. "Mendelian theory, and so on. Grey's parents had come from either side of the color bar. And Grey himself was white. But Grey's *ghost* inclined to the other side of the family, and so was black."

"It *might* be heredity. But I think it was trade unions." As our hostess made this strange announcement she looked brightly and largely around. "Strikes, you know. That sort of thing."

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"Strikes?" I said. "Trade unions? I don't follow that at all."

"If you are a worker and go against the other workers, aren't you declared black? I'm sure there's some such phrase. Well, as a ghost, Grey had done the wrong thing — worked too long hours, or something of that sort. And so he was black."

There was some laughter at this — I am bound to confess that I myself thought it uncommonly silly — and then the Bishop made a suggestion. "These are rather complicated notions. My own guess is much simpler. Poor Grey had either been strangled or burned to a cinder. Or perhaps he had been involved in amateur theatricals — say as Othello — at the time of his sudden death. And so his ghost —"

This received general acclamation, in which the speaker's concluding words were drowned. A bishop, as I have said, is a person of consequence in a modest establishment such as I was visiting. But now there was an unexpected contribution to the whole absurd discussion. It came from the Scotland Yard man — Sir John Appleby.

"These are all good speculations. But none of them, as it happens, is correct. I knew Whitewell, and I happen to know, too, the circumstances he was talking about. As a matter of fact, the Bishop was misled by only *hearing* the remark."

This seemed to me nonsense. "By only hearing it? I don't see what difference —"

"He missed the presence — well, of another capital letter. Black ought to be given one, as well as Grey. Grey's ghost was Black."

It took me a moment to make any sense of this. "You mean," I presently asked, "that Whitewell was really saying something like 'Robinson's ghost was Smith'?"

Appleby nodded. "Just that."

"Then it still appears to me to be quite meaningless."

Appleby smiled. "It depends on what you mean by a ghost."

It was plain that the man intended to tell us a story. From his wife's expression, I guessed that it would probably be of rather a tall order. Whether I was right in this, my readers must judge. I shall simply set down Appleby's words, as well as I can remember them . . .

"Ghosts — the sort with which, at least in the first instance, I am concerned — appear to be rather unfashionable. One can see why. The cinema and broadcasting and television have all tended to cut down people's reading time, and we no longer call for a prodigious literary output even from very popular writers. Ghost writers, therefore, don't much flourish except in a few specialized fields. For instance, there is still a small class of persons who believe that their own social or public eminence makes it incumbent upon them to commemorate their activities and persuasions in a book, but who are a little vague about how actually to put the bally

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thing together. For these to hire some smart fellow with the trick of scribbling is an obvious and quite innocent resource; and there are certainly a few ghosts who are always available for that sort of thing.

"But Grey's ghost was different. He was much closer to the old-fashioned article, employed to amplify the output of a professional author. And yet — at least at the start — he wasn't quite simply that, either. He was called in, one might say, as a specialist. If Grey hadn't begun life as a painter, I doubt whether the notion of a ghost would ever have come to him. For it is the history of painting, of course, that is full of little specialists — dab hands at this or that — being called in to do their stuff in one or another appropriate corner of the canvas.

"I see that some of you have now made a guess about Grey. And you are quite right. It is Hugo Grey that I am talking about — the powerful and somber rural novelist who died a good many years ago. By that time, it is true, he had pretty well ceased to be either rural, somber, or even particularly powerful. But to this I shall presently come.

"Grey's father, as you will no doubt recall, had been a Cumberland shepherd — as indeed all his ancestors had been since long before the poet Wordsworth took to celebrating the monolithic simplicity of that sort of person. Grey himself had monolithic simplicity, and his greatest characters and conceptions — to put it mildly — weren't exactly noted for their complexity. But decidedly his people were above life-size; his secret, as his great admirer Sir Edmund Gosse said, was to give epic proportions to the figures of a pastoral world. That — and perhaps their dark strain of primitive superstition — gave his books their striking individuality. What the younger critics have to say about Grey now I don't know, but in those days his rural folk were compared with Thomas Hardy's and George Eliot's. Learned persons earned grateful guineas by comparing his works with the *Dorfgeschichten* of Gottfried Keller. There was no doubt that Grey was going to be an immortal.

"It was doubtless the beautiful directness and simplicity of his mind that led him to hire Black. He read in the reviews, you see, that his peasants were superb, but that he couldn't do the gentry. Perhaps in that case he ought to have done without them. But Grey's plots were always thoroughly old-fashioned contrivances — it was one of the impressive facts about them that the rust positively flaked off his contraptions as the wheels went creaking round — and he always needed at least one gentleman, preferably a baronet, for such matters as seducing shepherds' daughters, foreclosing mortgages, destroying wills, and so on. And the reviewers would declare to a man that these patricians were intolerably wooden.

"Well now, when the patrons, say,

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of a Seventeenth Century Dutch painter declared his cows to be so good that you could hardly restrain yourself from reaching for a milking pail but his dogs to be such feeble inventions that nobody would think to heave a brick at them, the painter — as I've remarked — simply called in a good dog-man from round the corner. Grey called in Black.

"I doubt whether William Black's name will suggest much to any of you. He had begun life in some obscure and humble way on the stage. His personality appeared insignificant and perhaps rather effeminate, and it was said that he wore his large black beard in an effort to mask this. But Black could write, and he had a flair for polite life. He became a novelist — not perhaps very widely known, but greatly admired by a few for his polished, witty, sophisticated creations. His range was undoubtedly narrow, and it was notorious that his imagination never moved outside Mayfair. Yet there was no question of the purity of his small, carefully husbanded talent. He was always very hard up, and Hugo Grey was probably actuated by genuine benevolence as well as by his own simple astuteness when he made the arrangement he did. It was not suggested that there be a collaboration in any substantial sense. Black was simply to do whatever aristocratic or highly cultivated characters the conduct of Grey's plots required from time to time.

"The arrangement worked very well. The baronets and so forth in Grey's novels became full of life — you might say of really authentic baronial devil and *savoir vivre* — and people who felt they were in the know remarked how wonderfully Grey was assimilating the ways of that higher sort of society to which his literary eminence had gained him admittance.

"Then something rather odd began to happen. I expect several of you can recall it. The baronets took to spreading themselves over more and more of the picture and carrying their own world — which was of course Black's elected world — with them. For a time Grey's novels were panoramic representations of English society, the polite and rustic components being mingled about fifty-fifty. Readers were enthusiastic. Professors gave lectures explaining that the English novel had at last recovered the breadth and amplitude of its glorious past.

"In the next few years the balance swung even further, and Grey's rural scenes, although still wonderfully realized, became a progressively minor feature of the books. This was a gradual process, but at last something quite sudden and definitive occurred. Grey published *Storied Urns*. It was in many ways a brilliant novel, and some people maintained that the portrait of the old marquis was the most striking thing the author had ever done. But almost equally notable was something about the few rustic personages who lurked in corners of the story. They were universally described as completely wooden."

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Appleby paused on this, and somebody made the not very penetrating remark that it was a case of the wheel having come full circle. And the Bishop interrupted some stout work with his teaspoon to put a question. "It was simply that Grey had been growing increasingly lazy?"

Appleby nodded. "I think it was largely that. No doubt he had been paying Black at so much a line, and it was to Black's advantage to contribute as much as he could. Grey found that the books maintained their popularity with more and more of Black in them, and that his own profits were not seriously diminished by setting Black to do a heavier and heavier share of the work."

"Until Grey was really the dog-man himself?" Our hostess offered this with a great air of vivacious intelligence.

"Precisely. Grey just wrote in his rustics here and there. Eventually, of course, he grew reckless, and didn't bother even to do that. The Hugo Grey novels had become, in the old-fashioned sense, one hundred per cent ghost-writing."

"Surely," I asked, "that was extraordinarily immoral — and even positively fraudulent?"

Appleby shook his head. "That, I think, is where the Bishop's friend Whitewell came in. His opinion was sought — and sought by Black. Black had been a party to what, book by book, was without doubt increasingly a deception. But Black felt that he had been ill-used and that he ought to have some redress. The novels were now all his own work, but he had to take for them pretty well what Grey chose to give."

This time it was Lady Appleby who broke in. "But couldn't Black simply have started again under his own name?"

"That course was open to him, no doubt. But his own name had dropped into oblivion by this time, and he may have felt that a fresh start was something too formidable to face. He appears not to have been a strong character. Whitewell gave it as his opinion, I imagine, that Black had with full awareness got himself into the mess, that the legal position was quite cloudy, and that public reaction to any disclosure would decidedly not be to the advantage of either writer. Black was so disgusted that he shook the dust of England off his feet. That is to say, he collected what may have been his last few hundred pounds from the bank, and went off on one of those aimless cruises that were so fashionable at that time. And the next thing anybody heard about him was that he was dead."

We were all rather startled by this. The Bishop even checked himself in reaching for another lump of sugar. "I hope," he said, "that there was no question of — ?"

"It was all quite obscure, and I don't think there was anybody — except conceivably Grey — who was interested. But, of course, we are by no means finished with William Black yet."

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"Ah!" Our hostess was delighted. "You mean — ?"

"Just what you may guess. This is a ghost-story, you know, an orthodox Christmas ghost story — only the ghost in it is just a little out of the ordinary." Appleby paused and looked at us gravely. "As being a *ghost's* ghost, you know."

From Lady Appleby, who was sitting beside me, I thought I heard a resigned sigh. But when she spoke it was briskly enough. "I'm afraid there is nothing for it but to hear John through."

"But, my dear, we are dying to!" Our hostess had every appearance of being enchanted still. And she nodded to Appleby, who resumed his tale.

"You will see that losing Black put the eminent Hugo Grey in rather an awkward position. If he was to continue publishing novels he must either find another ghost writer or go back to his own monolithic rural stuff. Very sensibly, he decided to retire. It is not a thing that elderly writers often do — commonly they just can't afford to — but those who manage it sometimes find that it results in greatly enhancing their reputation. They become, so to speak, honorary Grand Old Men, and are generously praised by those with whom they have ceased to compete.

"This happened to Grey. He became almost at once a venerable leader of the profession of letters, and all sorts of honors were showered upon him. It was on one of those occasions that the trouble began.

"He was being given an honorary degree at one of the provincial universities — Nesfield, I think it was. Just what happened is a bit indefinite, largely because there is a tradition up there that the students should create a certain amount of liveliness during the proceedings. But the main fact is clear enough. While one of the bigwigs was making old Grey a pompous speech, telling him what a large whack of our glorious cultural heritage he was, Grey gave a sudden nasty sort of howl and bolted from the hall.

"Well, even in a Grand Old Man that sort of thing takes a bit of living down, and it seems that thereafter the unfortunate novelist thought it wise to lie rather low. It is true that some months later he did attend an authors' international congress and make a speech. But halfway through he was unfortunately and unaccountably taken ill, and was obliged to spend a week or two in a nursing home. There was a bulletin, I seem to remember, saying that he required rest. People naturally said that the old boy was breaking up.

"And now I can tell you his own story — for the simple reason that it ended in a small police investigation which came to my notice. What Grey conceived to have happened on both the occasions I have mentioned was a horrid supernatural visitation. The phantasm of Black had seemingly appeared from nowhere, advanced upon him through the assembled company in a threatening manner, and then disappeared. And Grey — like Mac-

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beth confronted by the ghost of Banquo — had been unable to take it.

"That was bad enough — but there was a second phase to the haunting that was much worse. Black's ghost settled in with Grey at home. This was naturally unnerving, and its calamitous effect upon its victim was the greater on several accounts. Grey, you remember, had that strong streak of primitive superstition in him. Moreover he had retired to his native fells and was now living in some isolation about a mile from the nearest village, alone except for two or three elderly female servants. And when the uncanny visitation took place once more — during a particularly hard winter — it was at a time that Grey had no outside visitors from week's end to week's end.

"At first the ghost's behavior was rather colorless. It just came and went, without seeming to be aware of Grey, and without any suggestion of intent. Well, that is how ghosts *do* behave. I mean, of course, *real* ghosts as distinct from story-book ones. And Grey, who was quite well up in psychical research, became convinced that he was dealing with what the textbooks call a veridical phantasm of the dead. That, in a way, ought to have eased his mind, since there is abundant evidence that real ghosts are almost pathetically harmless. But it is plain that, in point of fact, the thing steadily wore him down. And then Black's ghost *did* begin attending to him, and *did* seem to be cherishing some design. Grey would wake up to find the phantom glaring at him over its great beard — and it would then raise an arm, point, and glide from the room. On one occasion Grey plucked up courage to get out of bed and follow it — only to have the embarrassment of finding himself tumbling into the arms of his cook. As he was dressed only in pajamas, and as she was a comparatively new employee, this upset him very much. Apparently — quite without knowing it — he had taken to giving a bit of a yelp as soon as the apparition showed up, and on this occasion the woman had heard him and come to investigate.

"The climax came on Christmas Eve. Hitherto the ghost had only appeared to Grey when he was in his bedroom. He was quite unprepared, therefore, for the experience that befell him shortly after dinner. He commonly finished the day, it seems, in his study — a long, low, book-lined room on the ground floor. Although he had given up writing in any large way he still produced an occasional Grand Old Man's review, and for this purpose he kept a typewriter on a table at the far end of the room.

"He was surprised, as he entered, to hear the sound of this machine in operation. He was more surprised still when, by the light of a small lamp standing on the table, he saw nothing but an empty chair — and the typewriter at work under the plain impulsion of a supernatural agency. For there could be no doubt of it: the keys were flicking up and down, the carriage moving to and fro,

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and the little bell going *ping* — although there wasn't a soul in the room but himself!

"Grey had just grasped the full horror of this when the machine stopped, and at the same time he heard a low laugh behind him. He swung round — and there was Black's ghost practically at his elbow. The ghost pointed down the room towards the typewriter, paused for a moment, and then vanished behind a window curtain.

"It seems that Grey was almost hypnotized. He moved dully down the room, took the paper from the machine, and read it. Of what he read, all I need give you is the heading. *A full and free confession by me, Hugo Grey, of my evil profiting by the genius and labour of William Black.* There followed a detailed statement and a space for a signature. The phantasm, it appeared, had a thoroughly businesslike side.

"Grey felt his reason deserting him, and he dragged himself off to his bedroom with some notion of lying down and composing himself. I needn't tell you that the specter was waiting for him. But this time there was a difference. Hitherto its appearances had been fleeting and had always obeyed whatever normal optical conditions the actual lighting of the room might be expected to impose. This time it remained steadily in evidence, but in a fluctuating light which Grey felt to be quite unnatural. And now as he stared at the apparition something unprecedented happened. The form and features of the ferociously bearded Black melted, faded, and re-formed — re-formed themselves into the very figure and lineaments of Grey himself! He was confronting *his own image* — confronting a hideously ingenious commentary, one might say, upon his own ambiguous relationship to another man. Once more — does it not? — the wheel comes full circle. We began with the proposition that Grey's ghost was Black. And here, finally, Black's ghost is Grey."

Appleby paused on this — as well he might. The Bishop — and it was with an air of finality at last — put down his cup. "A pretty tableau, Sir John. But one seeming to require for its resolution a decided *coup de théâtre*."

"And that is precisely what turned up. You remember that it was Christmas Eve. Well, at this agonizing moment there came a burst of singing from outside the house. It was a group of carol singers who had made their way with some pertinacity to Grey's remote dwelling. Theirs was the first incursion of an outer world for more than a week — and it broke a spell. Grey found himself reaching for the first object he could lay his hand on — I believe it was a hair brush — and hurling it with all his might at that spine-chilling simulacrum of himself. There was a crash of glass and the image vanished. And at that Grey fainted away.

"He came to in the presence of his housekeeper and his cook, and he was plainly delirious. They sent for a

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doctor. And the housekeeper, who appears to have been a shrewd woman, sent also for the police. When they arrived they found the cook rather hastily packing her trunk. Or rather — need I say it? — *his* trunk."

"Black — the living Black!" Our hostess, having achieved this powerful feat of mind, delightedly clapped her hands.

"Precisely. Black's supposed death had been the beginning of an ingenious plot which he was peculiarly well-fitted to carry out. You will remember that beneath his great beard he was an effeminate little man and his early training had made impersonation easy. Moreover, his obscure theatrical start had, it seems, been as a magician, and the trick typewriter had been one of his most successful properties."

"But the business of the dissolving ghosts?" Our hostess was all acuteness.

"It required nothing more elaborate than a couple of lamps, a dimmer controlling them, and the large mirror on Grey's own wardrobe."

"And so the truth came out?"

"Dear me, no. An *éclaircissement* would still have been to the advantage of neither, and so the whole odd business was hushed up. That is how I came into it myself. My opinion was asked about whether the local police might reasonably drop their inquiries," he said.

"And poor Black remained entirely obscure?"

"Entirely." Appleby smiled blandly. "That is apparent from the fact that none of you has ever heard of him."

"But of course we have all heard of the eminent Grey." It was Lady Appleby who delivered herself of this, and I fancied she gave her husband rather a grim look. "We have all — at least tacitly — acknowledged our familiarity with his works. My own favorite, I confess, is *Storied Urns*. Bishop, what is your favorite Grey?"

There was a second's silence. It was brilliantly broken by our hostess. "My dears!" she cried, and once more she clapped her hands. "My dears, just look at the clock!"

It had not been a mildly empty interval after all.

Note:

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Mabel Seeley was born in Herman, Minnesota, where her father taught history in the local high school. The oldest of six children, she grew up in the kind of family that, every day of the week and every week of the year, finds life both exciting and funny. Indeed, according to Mrs. Seeley, the individual members of the family considered each other simply uproarious!

This daily joy of living, this bubbling happiness to be "alive and kicking," was fed in the young Mabel Seeley by the tales she heard throughout her childhood — tales told, with verve and gusto, by the Norwegian immigrants and their descendants who lived all around her in otherwise cold Minnesota. And perhaps it was these early tales — the memory of them, the lingering flavor of them — that not only set Mrs. Seeley on her ultimate career as an author but instilled in her work the vitality and earthiness, the convincing realism, of her backgrounds and characters.

But before Mabel Seeley became a best-selling novelist, she saw her father turn to farming, and thus, for a short period in her life, learned a new kind of Minnesota living, far different from the earlier academic atmosphere. She attended high school in St. Paul, and was graduated from the University of Minnesota. On leaving college, she expected to become a writer at once; but the necessity of earning a living channeled her creative talents, and for ten years she wrote only advertising copy. Finally the childhood influence took hold and would not be denied: she left advertising to devote her full time to writing.

In 1938, her first novel, THE LISTENING HOUSE, *appeared — and a new star was born. Mabel Seeley's first book is now considered a modern classic in the mystery field. Other fine books followed, including serious novels like* A WOMAN OF PROPERTY, *and* THE STRANGER BESIDE ME, *and her most recent novel of suspense,* THE WHISTLING SHADOW . . .

One of Mrs. Seeley's most deeply rooted interests in writing is to experiment — to experiment with words and emotions, and their subtle intertwining, and their equally subtle connotations. In such experiment, style is a dominating factor, and where there is style there is apt to be a more conscious obscurity and a more deliberate obliqueness. But such experimenting — especially when kept within the bounds of readability, as Mabel Seeley always does — has its rewards, and not the least of them is a greater and more satisfying reader-participation. So, savor Mabel

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Seeley's prize-winning story about Everett Bayard Swales, the semi-detached bachelor who played God. For what the author has attempted in this story is not so much to portray a man's character as to betray *it — a distinction not to be dismissed lightly . . .*

LET RUN, OR CATCH?

by MABEL SEELEY

WITH ONE OF HIS FLASHES OF amused perception toward both himself and the Deity, Everett Bayard Swales considered that there were times when his own attitudes were rather similar to God's. God too, in human affairs, maintained detachment, and interfered, if at all, solely by choice.

Take Caroline Weaver now, Swales's neighbor of ten months. More and more clearly, these past few weeks, it was becoming apparent that he held Miss Weaver in his weighing palm. "Stay safe," he might indulgently proclaim to Caroline Weaver; "go right on as you're going. If I'm not mistaken — and it's very rarely that I am mistaken — you're heading for destruction."

Miss Weaver, dutifully, would stay safe or meet destruction — as Everett Bayard Swales chose.

Long before he'd had any actual sight of Mr. Filsom, that individual was thrust upon him. "— the most absolutely wonderful new person," was how Miss Weaver put it, with her chattery inconsequence. "I do want the two of you to meet — my place some night, I hope; I'll cook dinner. Mr. Filsom — Mr. Leonard J. Filsom — you don't happen to have heard of him? He's traveled so widely, you know. Not abroad as much as you, but more in this country. Mexico, too. He's quite wild about Mexico. So much color, he says. So much action and gaiety —"

Never, as Swales was certain, did any such outpouring fall on him by chance; one of his earliest discernments of Miss Weaver was the naïveté with which, when he came home from work in the evenings to the twin bungalow they tenanted, she happened to be fumbling in her handbag for her key, or watering her window box, or clipping the hedge that enclosed them from neighbors.

"That Aquatennial parade last night, did you manage to get to it, Mr. Swales?" This was another day. "Mr. Filsom found such a good spot for us. All those floats and the moonlight — last fall when I moved here from Ellsworth I was the tiniest bit — well, disappointed, I can say that now. But Minneapolis is exciting and glamorous, isn't it, when you've found

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someone who knows where to go? Those rose gardens at Harriet, and canoeing along the lagoons into Lake of the Isles — I never knew places could be quite so heavenly."

Even for him, from no more than this chatter, it wouldn't have been possible to see the whole picture. Always there was a chance that Miss Weaver had actually stumbled on what spinsters of 50 so wistfully dream of and so seldom find — an interested and eligible male. Here and there in Miss Weaver, if one looked, it was possible to see remnants of winsomeness: ash-blonde hair graying, but cut in a nicely shaped cap, and well curled; a small mobile person which said she might have spent most of her life running up and down stairs, as she likely had. Undoubtedly money, too; not overmuch, but a competence.

Idly, now and again, during the period when it had been Swales to whom Miss Weaver had tried to attach herself, he had guessed at the amount of that competence. "Maybe I should think about getting a job," Miss Weaver had let fall, during a dinner she had cooked for him. Not one of the earlier dinners, when she had been so pinkly hopeful, but a later one when she must have begun to see that it was no use. "Not that I need a job; I suppose I should be grateful I don't. But something to get me out where I'll meet people —"

Hardware had been the source of the Weaver income — hardware back in Ellsworth, Wisconsin. There had been a store which her father had owned and which at its sale might have brought in twenty thousand. Say, ten thousand at a minimum, thirty at most. After Mother Weaver had succumbed to a heart attack and sister Alice to pneumonia, Father Weaver had been the last to go. Another ten thousand, then, from Father's life insurance, or say even fifteen. Add eight thousand, or ten, from the family home —

Thirty thousand, she might have had, when she decided to spread her wings. Thirty-five, even forty. A neat little package. Not one to bowl over an Everett Bayard Swales who knew the worth of himself and his bachelorhood, but one that might well beckon a lesser man.

It wasn't until he had seen Leonard J. Filsom that the more definite scent arose.

Queerly enough, it took place, this first glimpse, not through any of Miss Weaver's arrangements, but by sheer accident. Swales was in his bank during one lunch hour, his endorsed salary check and deposit slip in hand, second in line at a window for checking accounts. Glancing toward a longer line at a savings window, he found himself looking at Miss Caroline Weaver — Miss Weaver with a reckless young swing to her shoulders in oyster-white knitted wool, face sparklingly flushed under a pearl-spangled pink bonnet. Behind her, not alongside, loitered a reddish-brown man in a reddish-brown suit. Average as to height, but a little bulky. Sporting a green felt hat set well back on thick

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reddish-brown hair, and snapped low at the front. Reddish-brown skin speaking of luxurious and leisurely sunning, and an easy wide smile speaking of an open and affable good humor.

Miss Weaver, gaily turning backward, drew the man with her into joint activity. The man, maintaining his effect of carelessly waiting for someone, and seemingly of having happened on Miss Weaver by mere chance, looked smilingly past her. To right, to left, over her head —

The area behind him also came under scrutiny. No tightness at the eye corners hinting of any wariness in this glancing about, but just the same —

Not exactly *flaunting* his acquaintance with Miss Weaver. This, cattishly — *in* humorous self-deprecation the cattishness was admitted as soon as it rose — was Everett Bayard Swales's first thought. But then, as he was turning away with his initialed passbook, the second and more telling perception came to him. No, it wasn't his nearness to Miss Weaver which the reddish-brown man wished to keep inconspicuous. It was *himself*. As if, in a bank, he was ill at ease. As if, in a bank or perhaps in any exposed place, he'd have liked a cloak of invisibility.

Aquatennial parade. Rose gardens at Harriet. Canoe for two on the lagoons. Picnics. Movies. Drives in his road-worn car. Miss Weaver hadn't stinted at relaying the progress of friendship. Progress, it was now to be noted, taking place either in surroundings so public they were not noticeable, or so private they were likewise unseen. Not in foursomes. Not in favorite restaurants. Not amid relatives and friends.

With his lunch hour fast fading, there was no chance for Swales to make a more direct contact. In the interests of seeing surmise take shape, though, he went so far as to emerge from his front door at supper-time, when his window had told him of a car swinging to the curb. No dingy old relic, this, but a new dark-green Mercury. From it, gallantly, the reddish-brown man was descending to round the hood and hand out Miss Weaver on the near side. At the moment Swales was discovered approaching, however, the reddish-brown man snapped, "If I'm to get back in an hour I'd better hop," and was into the car and off before Miss Weaver scarcely had her balance.

"Well!" Midway up the front walk, Everett Bayard Swales permitted himself a slight benign playfulness. "Now, who's being evasive, your boy friend or you? I notice we've not had that dinner yet."

Accosted so jocosely, Miss Weaver came toward him, fluttering.

"Oh, Mr. Swales, Leonard had not the least idea — he'd *never* — did you get a look at our car, at all? We've bought it together, the two of us — his was so old and broken down — I used to drive once, but Father — you mustn't think I've forgotten. I *do* want you and Leonard to know each other! I said only the other day,

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'Leonard, you must meet *someone* I know,' but there's been so much to do, just the two of us —"

Poor fool. Poor idiot fool. Back in Ellsworth, Wisconsin, had she never read newspapers? Heard no tales? Had she kept herself deafened and blindfolded to what the world was really like? "To me," that was what this dazed and besotted Miss Weaver was saying inside herself, "this incredible glory is coming to *me*. Wonderful, exciting Leonard — handsome Leonard — he's beginning to love *me!* If he weren't, he'd never let me buy him the car. It's as if — oh, as if our lives were already one."

Was God ever tempted to alter a foregone conclusion, when the humans involved were so self-deceived? So hellbent on the shot in the dark and the early grave? No mold had been broken after Caroline Weaver had been born: there had been thousands like her before, and there would be thousands more. No mold had been broken after Leonard J. Filsom, either. As long as women cried out to be fleeced and destroyed, there would be men only too happy to oblige.

Yes, a human situation so trite and so hackneyed that it might have insulted Everett Bayard Swales's palate if it hadn't been for that little titillation of decision . . .

God, by this time, must see few human situations that are not trite and hackneyed.

Through the days that carried August to fall, Swales came and went juxtaposed to a certainty. The defiant flowering of Miss Weaver — new gray suit, new mauve accessories, new mink stole. The footsteps, calling for Miss Weaver, took two split-seconds from car to bungalow by daylight, but lingered long in the night. "Leonard's taking me to Somerset this weekend. He says I can have two dollars to gamble, not one penny more." "Can you guess what I'm getting for my birthday? A gold-link ankle bracelet — isn't that too ridiculous? Not the least fashionable any more, but Leonard wants me to wear one, and I think it's fun." "Leonard found out last night about my cracked elbow. He doesn't mind in the least, he says; from the way I use my arm he'd never guessed I can't get it out straight. Knowing Leonard makes me feel all people must be nicer than I ever thought they were."

Then, late in October, the inevitable . . . in quite dignified rapture. "Mr. Swales, you're really my only other friend in Minneapolis — I hope you'll be happy for us; we're being married next Monday. We decided last night. When I think how worried I was about never again having anyone who'd be near and dear to me — We're driving to Texas, we think, to begin with. Leonard has oil interests. Then later on to California and Mexico. There's hardly an inch of Mexico, Leonard says, he's not aching to show to me."

Four days more. Four days, then, for this part of the show to go on. Of Miss Weaver he might ask a few ques-

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tions — would you hire a gardener, he might say, with as little care? No references, no fixed address, no family? Your bank, any bank, could give you a credit search, find out about those oil interests. The nearest police station, any police station, might add pertinent data. Men like Leonard J. Filsom usually leave trails.

As for Leonard J. Filsom himself, what of him? Had he no apprehension whatever that somehow and from somewhere, at this final moment, his apple cart might be spilled? Elfishly, since this too was entertainment, Everett Bayard Swales once again went out of his way, this time stopping in at Miss Weaver's apartment at five minutes to 1 on the Sunday — the last day, it might have been said — of her maidenhood. This Sunday, at high noon, was one of the few hours Mr. Filsom might be counted on to turn up by daylight.

"Could I be of help?" The gambit was a simple one. "You must have a good deal of packing and so forth —"

Both flatlets in the house were partially furnished; already Miss Weaver was almost out of hers. Neatly, and so burnished they bristled, the provided accoutrements stood starkly apart in in the little square living-room, stripped of the doilies, the ashtrays, the small jars and vases, the rugs, the books and magazines with which Miss Weaver had cluttered them.

"Oh, no, that's too kind of you! There's little at all, really, and Leonard is such a help; you wouldn't know since you're gone so much, but he's in quite often — his hours aren't fixed like yours. He'll be here any minute now —"

She was wearing the mauve hat and the gray suit and the new mink stole. If Filsom knew any eating place obscure enough, they would dine out. In the dimness of a movie they would see a show, or they would drive somewhere to view the fall foliage. She was so obviously eager for Swales to leave; her small hands, anxious, made held-back gestures of shoving away. "Oh, come on," Leonard J. Filsom must have said, "why should I bother to meet your neighbor? He'll be nothing in our lives; we're starting out new."

No flutter of hands, though, was adequate to suppress a Holder of Balances. When the car swooped to the curb — as operated by Leonard J. Filsom cars always swooped — Everett Bayard Swales had not gone back to his own half of the bungalow. Desperately — Mr. Filsom must have been very decided about not wanting to meet a neighbor — Miss Weaver snatched up handbag and gloves, saying, I'll have to run — Leonard's just slightly late and we'll be quite rushed." But that didn't shake Nemesis either.

In the car, seeing Miss Weaver accompanied in her scurry down the walk, the reddish-brown man didn't move from his seat behind the wheel.

"Mr. Filsom? I'm Everett Bayard Swales, Miss Weaver's house partner, right next door." No shade, no inflection, must be allowed to hint that

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this was other than friendly urbanity; no failing of heartiness must mar the vigor with which, rather pushing Miss Weaver aside, Swales got ahead and stretched his hand into the car. "These are great things I hear of you — great things you two've got ahead of you. You're winning a prize in Miss Weaver, here — I must say I envy you."

No off shades, no off inflections, but the man at the wheel could scarcely miss the humor of that last flick. Reluctantly, Leonard J. Filsom accepted the proffered hand.

"Heard about you, Swales — been hoping to meet you. Know how it is — pretty well tied up — hope we'll be seeing you —" and at the first instant Swales gave way and Miss Weaver managed to squeeze into her seat, the wheels of the new dark-green Mercury began spinning in the damp crumpled scurf of the street, spraying fragments of leaf over the shoes left behind.

Just as Miss Weaver was distinguishable by her badly knit arm, so Leonard J. Filsom bore his mark. Not anything large, not anything crying for attention. In the hazel iris of Mr. Filsom's right eye, as if spattered there from the pupil, clustered three dark flecks. Flecks which a man like Filsom, otherwise so unmarked — smoothly chubby and moleless as to cheek, smoothly even as to toothline, smoothly guileless as to brow — must have cursed from his twentieth birthday on.

The car's license was Minnesota FJ3-6459. Everett Bayard Swales made careful note of it.

Halt — or not halt? Let run, or catch? For Miss Caroline Weaver, bedazzled, awed, transported — for Miss Weaver at her lover's side — for Miss Weaver in her fevered joyous slumbers that night, there could have been no prescience that her fate hung in the balance just next door. What about Filsom, though? "That Swales," Filsom must be swearing to himself, "is he butting into this?" "That Swales," Filsom must acknowledge to himself even while he held his arm about Miss Weaver, "he's no one's fool." "That Swales," Filsom must curse to himself, sweating awake in whatever dark burrow he inhabited, "he could stop me cold."

Filsom hadn't shown himself as exactly spend-happy during his courtship. Filsom most likely was next to broke.

A pity, actually, that the hours of this particular Sunday were no more than twenty-four — that each hour held no more than its 60 allotted minutes — that each minute ticked off no more than 60 seconds. All through his own dinner, so well self-cooked, so well self-served, all through the Sunday symphony he allowed himself, all through an evening of solitaire and a crossword puzzle, Everett Bayard Swales heard the beat of the other man's anxiety. Through the night, in his bed, the other man's desperation beat more and more insistently.

Monday afternoon, while Swales

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worked, the marriage took place. After that, of course, there were still things he might have done — visit the police himself, have an alarm sent out. But the edge had worn off. With her life, as well as with her gray suit, her mink stole, and her money, Miss Weaver had vanished to other spheres. Taking the new dark-green Mercury, his flecked eyes, and Miss Weaver, Leonard J. Filsom had vanished too. All that remained for Everett Bayard Swales — or so it seemed, at first — was the reading of newspapers and the wonder if some day somehow he would learn the outcome. Mrs. Filsom, as she now must call herself, was such a speck in the vast scheme of things that her taking off might never be publicized.

Yet it was. And in the measure one might have forecast.

On the tenth day of March, the next spring, an obscure three-inch item on an inside page of the Minneapolis *Journal* reported that the body of an unidentified woman, half clothed and strangled, had been found in a small Los Angeles hotel, in a room booked the previous evening by a Mr. and Mrs. James Hillstrom of Seattle. The deceased was approximately 50, hair ash-blonde and graying, no distinguishing marks except an imperfectly knitted old fracture of the left arm, near the elbow. The husband, James Hillstrom, was being sought for questioning.

It was almost astounding. On coming upon the terse obituary, Everett Bayard Swales experienced a small but perceptible shock, a quickening of some deeply set pulse. So entirely what he had anticipated. Except perhaps for time — late October to early March was more than four months. Longer, really, than anyone would have expected a Filsom marriage to last. Caroline Weaver had her pertinacities, as witness the play she had made for *him*. About giving up the whole of her inheritance, too, she might have developed some stubbornness. Leonard J. Filsom, who must own his own dreams of lush blondes and hot spots, had probably found the later stages of his marriage hard to bear.

Only once, in that quartette of months past, had Everett Bayard Swales let impishness move him. That was in February when, with an address from the Texas Bureau of Vehicular Registrations — child's play, given last year's Minnesota number — he had sent Mrs. Filsom a Valentine. Unsigned, naturally, as all Valentines should be, but Filsom wouldn't have missed the Minneapolis postmark, or missed the significance of a correct address. Since then — and before, too — there had been notices of other women slain — plump brunettes, nubile blondes, aged crones. Of this Los Angeles woman, though, there could be no doubt. She was Mrs. Filsom, née Caroline Weaver, and the James Hillstrom being sought might now be iron-gray as to hair, might wear ministerial black, might be driving something quite other than

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a new dark-green Mercury, but inescapably one eye would bear three dark flecks.

The Weaver caper had seemed near its end, for Swales; beyond this point he had not explored. Now, willy-nilly, a new avenue showed itself. Back in Ellsworth, Wisconsin, there might be people who, vaguely, recalled one of the Weaver girls as having broken an arm. Would such people tie in that arm with the one in a Los Angeles morgue? A corresponding friend or two, in Ellsworth, might have read ecstatic descriptions of Leonard J. Filsom, but would such descriptions have included the flecks in one eye? Out of the whole world it was likely that only he, Everett Bayard Swales, would link the dead woman with Miss Weaver; only he could point a straight finger at the man who had strangled her.

Biblically, it had been made very clear as to where, and in whose province, vengeance lay.

Pursuing his quiet course, pausing in the morning for greetings to his new neighbors — a married pair of no special interest — locking his garage and driving to work, aligning his books on his desk before plunging into the day's accounts, Swales tried and tested the new circumstance. In whatever burrow he had again found himself, what were Leonard J. Filsom's thoughts? "That fellow there in Minneapolis, that Swales —" did Filsom's mind follow any such track as this? "He's the one who followed us up, he's the one who sent that Valentine. It couldn't be anyone else. How is he on newspapers? That damn arm, they had to stick that in. Was he wise to it? He's the one who came out to the car, he's the one who could tie me in."

At the night-club table beside his newest lush blonde, with the swagger of drink on him, in the full kingliness of throwing around Caroline Weaver's money, did Leonard J. Filsom suffer any such hornet stings? There were no other pointers toward him; he wouldn't have left any. He wouldn't have had Miss Weaver along when he got a marriage license. He wouldn't have left fingerprints at the hotel, he wouldn't have left luggage —

For Filsom, this was an old jape, well practiced. He had bumped into no snags, except one, and even of that one he might not yet be entirely certain. How, if one were to consider it, might Leonard J. Filsom be *made* certain of the power now being held in Everett Bayard Swales's hands?

A new query, piquantly delicate. Not that any steps would necessarily be taken — but just supposing. Some message, sent saltily . . .

By this time Filsom might be anywhere. New Orleans, perhaps. Las Vegas. San Francisco. Not too far east; he'd have a car and be driving it — a Filsom without wheels was a centaur stripped of its legs. But wherever he was, there was one thing he scarcely could fail to keep doing: he'd be reading Los Angeles newspapers. He'd want to *know*.

The perfect communique had no need to be thought out; it budded

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and spread of its own accord. A notice, one for the *In Memoriam* column, in a Sunday issue of the Los Angeles *Times*. "Leonard J. Filsom," such a notice would toll, dolefully black-bordered, dolefully saccharine. "Leonard J. Filsom. He is Not Gone; He is Just Away."

Picture Leonard J. Filsom coming upon that tidbit among the death notices. Picture Leonard J. Filsom in some plushy hotel room, reclining against plump pillows, tall drink in hand, leafing swiftly through an otherwise unmenacing *Times* — and then coming to that item. Picture him reading it . . .

Ideas that exquisite were never conceived to be stillborn.

Prudently, from the mailbox which started the notice on its air-sped way, Everett Bayard Swales continued on to the police substation which stood on Lyndale between Fiftieth and Fifty-first. The big window at the front of the station was shaded, but men came and went, allowing glimpses of a square white-plastered room within, a desk with a man behind it, a bench and two armchairs, a filing cabinet and a drug-store calendar. An office that might have been a real estate broker's, a lawyer's, or even a bookmaker's, if it hadn't been for a look about the men who came and went. Saturday, this was, March 13th, three days after Swales had read about the death. It would be Sunday, March 21st, that the notice would appear in the Los Angeles *Times*. Another day or two — Monday, perhaps Tuesday — before it got to wherever Filsom was now staying.

A week, a whole week, for Swales to savor a flawless divertissement! After that, on going to the police, one would be nonchalant, casual, perhaps borrowing a little from Miss Weaver's style. "I've been a bit worried, here — I had a neighbor last year, a Miss Caroline Weaver. She married and went away — man I saw only once. Few days back, I read of a woman being found dead in Los Angeles — a woman who had an unusual fracture of the left arm. It's been coming back to me — I didn't know Miss Weaver well at all, but —"

That should do it — just that.

Each night, through that savoring week, Everett Bayard Swales included a walk past the substation as part of his day's routine. On Monday, March 22nd, dallying, he toyed with the idea of making this the day. The Sunday Los Angeles *Times* for the day before hadn't yet reached Minneapolis, but that didn't mean it hadn't reached Leonard J. Filsom; anytime now the hounds could be put to the trail. Still, it would be a shame not to allow Filsom a little more time to know how he was being tossed and teased, and what now would come to him. A pity if a little ooze didn't crust over Filsom's skin. The next day — or even Wednesday — would be time enough.

Smiling, Swales ambled on from the police station homeward, pausing on his doorstep to sniff, through an ice-fast night, for the least mellowing

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of spring. He noticed tolerantly that his neighbors were out again. Then slowly he unlocked his door on the inviolate privacy he had built for himself — on the antique table and highboy which added so much grace to the landlord-bought sofa and chair — on the Bougereau which had taken two years' savings but was so eminently worth it. It was a room such as the wife-burdened seldom possessed. In his kitchen he poured cold milk, drank it, and went on to his bedroom, where he clicked on the light.

Leonard J. Filsom wasn't far away; Leonard J. Filsom hadn't waited for wheels.

He was there in Everett Bayard Swales's bedroom, beside Everett Bayard Swales's bed.

The movement made by Leonard J. Filsom was very swift. During it, Everett Bayard Swales had little time for reconsidering his attributes.

Or God's.

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EDITOR'S FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **L. J. BEESTON**

TITLE: **£ 5000 for a Confession**

TYPE: Thriller

LOCALE: London

TIME: Fin de siècle

COMMENTS: *Recipe for a Literary Old-Fashioned: Take a journalist, a doctor, an actor-manager, and an amateur detective — put them in divan chairs in the lounge of The Yellow Club — and mix in a blood-curdling situation . . .*

AT ABOUT HALF-PAST TEN ONE NIGHT Westram came into the lounge of The Yellow Club.

"The floodgates of heaven are opened; just listen to it!" he said, lowering himself into a divan chair. He looked round at the few men in the circle of firelight. "Where's Berbaska?" he asked.

"Billiards," said Woods, a doctor.

"Where do you come from, out of the rain?" yawned Shepperson, an actor-manager.

"I have been trying to sit out *The Crimson Stare*, at the Peerage Theatre," answered Westram.

"And failed, of course. So will *The Crimson Stare*. I had the first offer of it. Parts of it are balderdash, and the rest piffle."

"A trenchant criticism," said McLeod, a journalist. "You are severe, Shepperson; you generally are severe."

There entered into the period of fifteen minutes which followed this brief dialogue a rather peculiar atmosphere. It started presumably from the time when Westram had dropped in. He seemed tired and out of spirits, and he kept jerking his neck round towards the door.

At 11 o'clock Berbaska came in from the billiard room. He came complaining that "his luck was infernal; that it was always infernal," and he took up a position right in front of the fire, standing with his back to it — an irritating habit of his; but he was not a popular man at the club.

"Westram asking for you," said McLeod. "Wake him up."

"Who's asleep?" snapped Westram.

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"I'm not. Neither do I want Berbaska particularly. There were so few of you when I came in, and I wanted more. I have something I should like to say to you chaps. The truth is I wasn't at the Peerage Theatre tonight; I wasn't at any theatre. I have been in a slum off the East India Dock Road. I have been with a man who is hiding from justice — or, rather, a miscarriage of justice. He is hiding there like one of the East India Dock rats; and the amazing part of the story — but I'm going too fast.

"I have got to be careful. The man is the best friend I ever had, and I don't want him laid by the heels through my chattering. I must invent a name — let's call him Presland. Rather more than a year ago the police were after him on a common or garden charge of burglary, but he did not wait for arrest. Now this part of the story is ordinary, and can be told in a few words. Presland had been brought up by an English baronet and statesman, though no relation. A hard rein was put on him, and he broke from it. He was ordered out of the house like a dog. Three days later he returned — so runs the charge against him — came in the dead of night, put together certain valuables in the way of trinkets and plate, was interrupted by a servant, knocked the unfortunate domestic down and killed him, and bolted with the plunder.

"Presland knew better than to linger when he knew that his late guardian had flung him to the police. The evidence was perfectly clear. He had left fingerprints aplenty; there was the damning story of the poor old servant.

"So much for the unexciting part of my story. Now for the other.

"A year after Presland vanished from all human tracks, an old aunt, who had cut him throughout the past, quarreled with the statesman-baronet, and by way of spite left all her considerable wealth to her disgraced nephew. The spite wouldn't have had any cutting edge, of course, if the old lady had continued to live; but she died soon after.

"My poor friend Presland was a rich man — if he knew it. He had only to come out from obscurity and say, 'Give me my thousands!' But first he would have to take his trial for housebreaking and murder; and so he continued to lie *perdu* — as most of us would, in the circumstances.

"Suddenly I was startled to hear from him. He was in London and begged me to see him. I went, and found him in abject poverty.

"At that time I had no doubts about his being guilty. How could I? The evidence was clear as lightning against a thundercloud. Yet almost his first words were to assure me that he was absolutely innocent. Did I believe him? I did. Old esteem, backing his simple and earnest statement, was enough for me. Yes, I believed him, and that in spite of the fact that he added nothing to his assurance. It was palpable to me that he did not want to add anything, and I did not press him.

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"He knew about the legacy. He knew of the dawn that was waiting for him, but first he would be compelled to pass through the prison night. He shrank from it. How could I advise him otherwise?

"I chose a better way: I made up my mind to institute inquiries on my own account and see if I could get to the bottom of the mysterious affair. I seemed to have a clear field; no one had muddied the track because no one doubted that Presland was guilty.

"On paper it seems so easy to be an amateur detective, but in practice it is different. However, my time is my own, and I was not stopped by difficulties, nor disheartened by wrong theories. I struck a clue; I followed it up with patience and perseverance, and I found my man!"

Westram paused on a note of triumph.

"Or you think you have," sneered Berbaska.

"Oh, I have got him all right."

"Good egg, Westram!" laughed Woods. "Does he know that you have him?"

"He has not the slightest idea."

"Can you net him?" demanded McLeod, a trifle excited.

"Unfortunately — no. Convinced as I am of his guilt, there are one or two dark spots which beat me every time."

"Detective Westram has his limitations," mocked Berbaska.

"Don't jibe," said Shepperson. "Go on, Westram; you really are becoming entertaining."

"I must admit that I find the situation exasperating, almost maddening," continued the narrator. "Just another link, or perhaps two, and my chain of evidence would be complete. As it is, if I tried to throw the chain over him now he would elude or snap it; and I have to be very wary, or he may take fright and clear off. I considered the matter from every angle, and when I realized that it was a true deadlock, I went to Presland and told him all that I had done on his behalf.

"He was deeply interested, profoundly grateful, and burned with anxiety to throw light on the obscure places of that track which lead from the crime to that man whom I *know* to be guilty. But although his intellect is keener than mine, and with so much more at stake, we could work out no method of pinning our man to the ground. And while we argued and I worked, I began to suspect that the quarry had caught wind of our design.

"I communicated my fears to Presland, but he had anticipated them, and was ready with as remarkable a countermove as can be imagined. He said:

" 'There is a possible way out of this *impasse*, and we ought to try it. The hour in which I am cleared of this charge is the hour in which I claim my property. Having used up all our ideas to defeat the enemy, we must now negotiate with him. Go to him, Westram; put all your cards upon the table; offer him five thousand pounds for a full confession.' "

"Oh, glory!" interrupted McLeod.

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"Now what do you think of that?" cried Woods.

"Excellent," chuckled Shepperson.

"Excellent nothing," snorted Berbaska. "Where was this Presland chap to get his five thousand from?"

A general murmur told that the question had got home.

"Oh, do not you worry, Berbaska," smiled Westram.

"I? Worry? Am *I* the mysterious man at the end of your mysterious track?"

Westram threw back his head in silent laughter. "That is a good joke, Berbaska," said he. "Will you allow me to keep it up, in order to give point to my story? Now let us assume — idiotically, of course — that you *are* the culprit. If I were to say to you, here and now, 'Write me down, in the presence of all these witnesses, a complete acknowledgment of the crime, and I will hand to you, here and now, the sum of five thousand pounds,' what would you say?"

Berbaska's reply was instantaneous. "I should say, 'Show me your five thousand,' " he snapped.

"And a damn good answer too," chuckled Shepperson.

"Right!" said Westram. "Here you are, boy."

There was a flutter of excitement as Westram produced a fat roll of banknotes from an inside pocket and handed them to Berbaska.

The latter hesitated, flushing a little, then examined the roll. "All in one-hundred-pound Bank of England notes," said he, when he had finished. He handed them back to Westram. "How did your friend Presland manage it?" he demanded.

"He didn't manage it. He couldn't. Those notes are my notes. I am not a poor man. For a friend's sake one takes a risk occasionally. He will pay me back when he comes into his property. I shall offer that substantial sum to the man concerned. It will mean a disclosure of my hand, but I will chance that. Better chance it than wait until the fellow disappears, for I feel that he suspects the net which I have been weaving round him."

"Endeavoring to weave round him," corrected Berbaska.

"Endeavoring is the word."

"Keeping the joke going," said Berbaska, apparently not ill-pleased to find himself giving entertainment to the rest, "if you were to offer those notes to me I should suggest that they were bogus."

"Five thousand pounds in bogus notes? How is it possible that I could get such things? Besides, you could have them tested. But they are good stuff, Berbaska, I assure you."

"Oh, come," remonstrated McLeod, "don't forget that you are keeping a jest rolling."

"Exactly," said Berbaska with a faint smile. "I presume, Westram, that — continuing the sham idea of my being guilty — if I were to put down a confession and receive the money for it, you would give me a sporting chance to make a getaway?"

"Certainly. Your arrest would not much interest me. It is the clearing of

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my friend's name and his receiving his property that counts with me. Time would be allowed for you to vanish — five thousand pounds and all."

"How much time?"

"How much would you want?"

"A week?"

"A week you should have."

"I should have to accept your word."

"My word and pledge given before everyone here."

Shepperson threw himself back with a guffaw of laughter. "Take him on, Berbaska! Take him on!" he said.

"Upon my word, there is something refreshing in this," chuckled McLeod.

Woods opened his lips to speak, then checked himself. He looked intently at Berbaska, as if he saw, with his keen professional eye, something in the latter's furtive gaze and slightly paled face which interested him.

After Shepperson's laughter a silence ensued. Berbaska, still standing before the fire, looked down at his boots; Westram watched him, half-amusedly.

Presently Berbaska said, still looking down: "This man whom you have in your mind will be altogether unprepared for such a remarkable offer."

"Oh, I don't know. He is a cool card, full of resource. Would *you* be unprepared? Would *you* want time to turn the proposition over and over, and perhaps find, too late, that it had been withdrawn?"

There was another pause. Suddenly Berbaska looked up. "No," said he. "I should close with it."

"Good man," purred Westram. "Let us keep this ball rolling. Paper! Paper! Berbaska is about to put down a confession!"

"Of sorts," interjected McLeod.

"Keep it short, or you will spoil this joke," advised Shepperson.

"But what the deuce can he say?" laughed another member.

"Don't make it too plausible, Berbaska," cried another, "or you will have to prove an alibi later on."

Woods watched Berbaska curiously.

The latter paid no attention to the chaffing. Buried in a divan chair, with a paper pad upon his knee, he commenced to write. He wrote quickly, only now and again pausing reflectively. Westram kept lighting a pipe, but it would not draw properly, or he was nervous, for it continued to go out. He tossed match after match into the open fireplace.

Suddenly Berbaska replaced the cap on his fountain pen. "There you are," said he calmly.

Westram put out a hasty hand.

"Wait!" added the other. "If I were the guilty man and this document were a genuine confession, what kind of fool should I be to hand it to you before getting the money?"

"One of the hide-bound variety," grinned Shepperson.

Westram, on whose cheeks a spot of red was beginning to glow, looked puzzled. He answered:

"There is something in that, but I could not hand you five thousand pounds for a piece of writing that might prove worthless."

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"I'll hold the money for him," interposed Woods quietly. "If the confession satisfies you, Westram, I'll see that Berbaska gets it."

"Good old Woods!" cried Shepperson. "He is taking it seriously."

Westram passed the banknotes to Woods, and received from Berbaska the few pages of writing. In a moment an intense concentration appeared to make him forget his surroundings. His eyes, unnaturally bright and eager, scanned what Berbaska had put down. The red spots in his cheeks grew bigger; an excitement which created a general wonder had gripped him.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Berbaska, in a harsh voice.

"My theory was correct," cried Westram, his voice shaken by triumph. "What I believed to have happened that night did happen. I had an idea that the common-or-garden burglary which occurred at the baronet's house that night was just a blind to cover something deeper. And it *was* a blind. This paper proves it!"

"I say, Westram, what is exciting you?" demanded McLeod.

"Has Berbaska read the riddle?" cried Shepperson.

"Certainly he seems to know all about it," said Woods dryly.

Berbaska lashed out: "All *you* have to do is hand over that money."

"When Westram gives the word, yes," was the calm reply.

"Keep cool, gentlemen; it is only a joke, you know," exhorted Shepperson.

"What is Berbaska's solution of the conundrum, Westram?" questioned another.

Westram quieted himself. "A most ingenious explanation," said he. "It would entirely account for my friend Presland's queer silence. There was a woman in the case — that is, Berbaska's solution makes it so. According to his story, Presland went to the baronet's house at a late hour to see a niece who was staying with her uncle, the statesman. They were in love with one another, and Presland went to say goodbye — went stealthily, like a thief. The tryst was interrupted by a servant. Although the fellow knew better, he put an abominable construction on the matter, and demanded hush-money. Presland knocked him down. His head struck the corner of a table, and he subsequently died. The alarm was raised, and my friend fled. For the girl's sake he breathed no word of what had occurred.

"So runs this part of Berbaska's solution. How does he get at his facts? He gets at them by making himself a guest at the house that night; says he was there himself; saw and overheard. And it is this part of the story which corresponds with so many of my own discoveries, which completes them absolutely.

"Berbaska makes himself out a guest at the house. He accuses himself, in this clever story, of having had his eye on a certain State paper in the keeping of the baronet. He secured it that night, but to cover his tracks he made it seem the work of an ordinary

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burglar. He removed several articles of worth from the house and deposited these in the depths of an unused well, where they still are. His idea was to make it appear that the paper, in its receptacle, had been unwittingly taken away by the cracksman. A smart idea. No sooner was his work accomplished, so he says, than Presland appeared upon the scene — came in his secret and stealthy fashion. What followed, you know. It is all daylight-clear now, and this signed confession, which you have all witnessed, saves Presland and condemns the writer — Berbaska!"

Westram closed the sentence with a snarl of triumph.

"Easy, easy!" interposed McLeod. "You mean that it *would* save the first and damn the second if it were a true admission, and not fiction."

"Tear the thing up," said Shepperson curtly.

"That is for Berbaska to say," cut in Woods.

"Be so good as to hand him his five thousand," ordered Westram, his voice quivering with excitement.

All at once a tense and electric excitement gripped every man in the room. The question *Is it real?* stared from every pair of eyes.

"Here you are, Berbaska," said Woods.

The latter took the roll of notes and plunged them into a side pocket. He bestowed one defiant and savage glance upon the transfixed company.

"A week, mind!" he snarled at Westram.

"A week: no more, no less."

The next moment Berbaska was gone.

A hubbub broke out, every man starting to talk at once. Westram motioned for silence.

"I have to assure you all that the transaction was a perfectly genuine one," he said. "My reason for approaching it in so indirect a fashion was because I thought it would tempt the fellow, by leaving him a loophole for escape. And then I wanted witnesses. I have been on his track for weeks and weeks, and he was beginning to feel it. I thought I could angle for him better in the way I chose, and I was right. I made it a business proposition, and I pulled it off!"

"Most extraordinary," exclaimed Shepperson.

"And you really will give him seven days in which to clear out of the country?"

"Did I say seven days?" answered Westram hesitatingly.

"We are under that impression," replied Woods coldly. "Of course —"

He was interrupted in a startling manner. The door was hurled open with violence, and Berbaska came rushing in. He ran straight at Westram, who recoiled suddenly. Everyone started to his feet.

"You infernal liar!" cried Berbaska in a shrill tone. "You think you have cheated me, do you?" He was on the point of throwing himself upon Westram when Shepperson flung himself between the two.

"What happened?" he demanded.

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Berbaska foamed. "Ask *him!*" he exploded. "Liar! Liar! There are two detectives waiting for me downstairs, and he — he put them there!"

Shepperson wheeled. "Is that true, Westram?" he snapped.

"It looks like it," said the other.

"But you haven't got me yet!" shouted Berbaska. "See here!" And before anyone could guess at his intention he rushed at the open fireplace and with bare fists crushed the entire roll of notes into the flames.

"So much for your cursed money, at any rate!" he snarled.

"Let it go," mocked Westram. "I have his confession, and that is good enough for me."

"Is it? Is it?" Berbaska almost screamed. "You thought all the fooling was on your side, did you? But I was ready for you! I put all that down with my own fountain pen, with an ink that fades ten minutes after it is used! You fool! What good will a bare sheet of paper be to you?"

He had not finished shouting before Westram was putting the boast to the proof. There was a rush to look over his shoulder.

The ink was fading so rapidly that the first half of the confession had already disappeared.

"He has beaten me!" gasped Westram.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Shepperson.

There was a roar of excitement, and it was terminated in an astonishing manner.

Berbaska turned with the utmost coolness to the three men who were endeavoring to draw the glowing mass from the flames.

"Let it alone, you chaps," said he. "Those are not banknotes. Here is the original roll, in my pocket. Cast your admiring eyes on Westram; throw your applauding orbs on me. We have been rehearsing, for the special benefit of our hard-to-please actor-manager here, a little sketch entitled *A Live Thrill*, by William Westram and James Berbaska. Shepperson, my good man, will you buy?"

With a single effort Shepperson, who prided himself in coolness in all emergencies, pulled himself together.

"British, American, and Colonial rights," said he.

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Another $250 in Cash Prizes

Step right up and unriddle the third in our new series of reader-participation contests, based again on an unfinished short story by Clayton Rawson and featuring his magician-sleuth, The Great Merlini, whose mind is quicker than the eye. For the benefit of those who did not compete in the previous contests, we give you a résumé of the conditions and rules: at the big moment in Mr. Rawson's murder story — when The Great Merlini says he knows the key to the mystery — we stop the tale and offer you a golden ($250 worth) opportunity to play Armchair Detective; when you have figured out the answer to the questions at the end of the story, write out your solution — on typewriter or in longhand, and preferably in 50-to-100 words — and mail it to the address below . . . For the best solution we will award a First Prize of $100, and for the 30 next best solutions, prizes of $5 each; in the event of ties, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

The judges are the members of EQMM's editorial staff. All contestants agree, as usual, that the decisions of the judges will be accepted as final. We guarantee that every contestant has an equal chance to win and that every submission will receive the judges' personal consideration; we cannot, however, undertake to return any of the entries.

The awards will be made wholly on the basis of merit — that is to say, on (1) the accuracy of your solution, and (2) the simplicity, clarity, and soundness of your reasoning.

And that's all there is to it. The rest is up to you and your little gray cells. You will find that Mr. Rawson's criminological conundrum is neither too easy nor too difficult, that the creator of The Great Merlini has conceived and executed his puzzler with a deliberate blend of foul play and fair play, with guile and wile on the one hand, perception and detection on the other — in a phrase, with legitimate legerdemain.

In order to announce the names of the winners as soon as possible, your answers must reach Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than December 21, 1955. This will give us just enough time to publish the names of the winners in our March 1956 issue (on sale and mailed to subscribers early in February 1956).

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One more point: the continuation of these prize contests depends on their popularity. If you like them — as occasional monthly features — why not let us know? Ditto if you don't like them. A postcard will do — and the majority opinion will prevail . . . In the meantime, try your hand again. Can you beat The Great Merlini to the punch?

And the best of luck to you all!

MERLINI AND THE SOUND EFFECTS MURDER

by CLAYTON RAWSON

THE SECOND-FLOOR APARTMENT IN the old brownstone front on East 68th Street consisted of a living room, bedroom, kitchenette, bathroom, and study. Entering this last room, The Great Merlini found an imposing array of instruments for capturing and reproducing sound — a complication of hi-fi equipment, microphones, amplifiers, and tape recorders. Shelves that covered one wall were filled to overflowing with neatly catalogued records and rolls of tape. The room also held one weary and worried F.B.I. agent, a tired and disgruntled Inspector Gavigan, and, on the gray-green carpet before the divan, a large irregular dark stain.

"At two in the morning," Merlini said, "I'm not too alert. But on the phone you seemed to be saying something highly uncomplimentary about — an invisible man."

"It was an understatement," Gavigan growled. "Did you, by any chance, happen to know Jerome Kirk?"

The magician nodded. "Sound Services, Incorporated. A complete line of offstage noises, bird calls, train whistles, tribal drums, thunderstorms — you name it, we have it. He was also the man who invented the phantom woodchopper."

F.B.I.-man Fred Ryan said, "Phantom what?"

"Woodchopper. The apartment owners in this block got together a few years back and had a dozen trees planted along the curb to give the street a Parisian touch. Real proud of them they were. At three A.M. one morning, with neat theatrical timing, Kirk aimed a loudspeaker out through his window and let the neighbors listen to a hi-fi recording of a lumberjack in the Maine woods. It was a nice clear recording — you could even hear the axe bite into the wood and the chips fly. After a few minutes of this busy and efficient chopping heads were poked out of every window on the block. And then, loud and

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clear, came the clarion cry: '*Timber!*' — followed by the crack of splitting wood and the long slow crash as a giant of the forest toppled and fell with a final earth-shaking boom."

"I wonder," Gavigan said, still glum, "how he managed to escape shooting until now. When Kirk didn't show up this afternoon to supervise the sound effects on an NBC telecast they sent a man after him." The Inspector looked toward the bloodstain. "He was lying there with four bullet holes in him."

"Four?" Merlini asked. "That seems a lot. Noisy, too."

"Not here. This room is soundproofed. At exactly 2:44 P.M. someone stepped in through the door from the living room and started blasting. Kirk took the first shots standing up."

Gavigan pointed to the liquor cabinet at the end of the divan. The jagged lower half of a bottle of whiskey stood there with several highball glasses. Another glass, curiously intact, lay amid the splintered fragments of a soda bottle that had fallen and smashed on the stone hearth of the fireplace.

"One shot, a miss, plowed through the glassware. One got him in the arm, and the third hit him dead center in the chest. The last two entered his back. They were fired after he had fallen face down on the floor. Somebody wasn't taking any chances."

"Somebody," Ryan added disgustedly, "who never entered this building, never left it, and who isn't here now. Either that or he's invisible. And I can't write up a report with anything like that in it." The F.B.I. man got to his feet and faced Merlini belligerently. "This building has three floors. The super and his wife, who occupy the ground-floor apartment, spent the day in Jersey visiting relatives. The third floor is occupied by a sexy dish who sings in a Village night club under the name of June Barlow."

"She's a refugee," Gavigan added, "from a church choir in East Orange where she was billed as Gertrude Schwartzkopf. I talked to the minister and he speaks highly of her. I didn't tell him we found a pair of Kirk's pajamas in her bedroom closet."

"On those grounds," Ryan said, "Gavigan would have her downtown now sweating out a third degree — except for one thing. Even if she sometimes sounds like four people she can't be in two places at the same time."

"Sounds like four people?" Merlini asked.

Ryan nodded. "She admits being here in this room with Kirk from noon until nearly two. She says they were recording — making one of those Les and Mary Ford multiple jobs. She puts a song on tape. Then it's played back, she harmonizes with it, and a second recorder gets the combination. Repeat that routine twice more and you've got a quartet — all the voices hers. Could be that's what she and Kirk were doing — there are a couple of tapes like that here. But what we do know for sure is that she was seen getting into a cab

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out front a few minutes after two o'clock. She says she went to a Carnegie Hall studio for a vocal lesson. Her voice teacher and an elevator operator both agree she got there at 2:20 and was in the Carnegie Hall studio for over an hour."

"Kirk," Gavigan put in, "was shot to death nearly half an hour *after* she got there. And this building, from the time she left it until the body was found, was empty — except for Kirk and three F.B.I. men."

"One," Ryan continued unhappily, "was on the roof. Two were in the front room, ground floor. We've had them there for forty-eight hours. One of the mob who shot up that bank in Queens and killed two tellers last week has been holed up across the street — Joe the Chopper. We were waiting for his two pals to show so we could take them all at once. If Kirk was one of them it's a new wrinkle for Joe — he's always worked with professionals only. On the other hand, it looks like his kind of a killing. He's trigger-happy and, like most crooks, a lousy shot. But he's also six-foot-three and weighs over two hundred pounds — about as invisible as a circus elephant."

"Joe," Merlini asked, "was across the street all afternoon?"

"He hasn't shown his ugly face since he checked in there two days ago. And he was there early this evening when we went in with tear gas and brought him out."

"And he couldn't have shot Kirk from across the street — this room has no windows. Is there a back entrance?"

"One door, two windows," Gavigan said, "all locked on the inside. And anybody coming that way would have stumbled smack over the two F.B.I.-men in the front room trying to get through to the hall. We've also searched the joint three times — every last broom closet."

"And I take it the two F.B.I.-men had a good view of the front door of this building as well as the one across the street?"

"It was right under their noses," Ryan said. "No one came near it going either way."

"And of course the two F.B.I.-men alibi each other," Merlini said slowly. "Which means that the only person who could have killed Kirk is the F.B.I.-man who had access to the trapdoor on the roof."

Ryan turned and glared at Gavigan. "And you said this magician might be able to help!"

For the first time the Inspector almost smiled. "Merlini," he said, "I have a hunch Ryan won't buy that. It happens that he took the afternoon shift on the roof himself."

"The report he is going to have to write is a problem, isn't it? Mr. J. Edgar Hoover isn't going to like any part of it."

"And the Commissioner," Gavigan added, "is already breathing fire. If the only answer you can come up with is Ryan himself —"

"A policeman's lot is not a happy one," Merlini said. "But what about

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the magician who is routed out of bed at 2 A.M. and asked to conjure an invisible man out of thin air?" He scowled at the dark stain on the carpet. "I doubt if it will help much, but there's one thing I'm curious about. You said that Kirk was shot at exactly 2:44 P.M. I know very well the Medical Examiner didn't take a look at the body and come up with a time of death as precise as that. How do you know . . ."

"We didn't have to ask him," Gavigan replied. He turned to a console radio and the tape recorder on its top. "When we got here both these machines were running. At two o'clock Kirk tuned in WQXY and began taping a symphonic concert. The tape is good for ninety minutes — we know because we played it back. After the concert there was a station break at three o'clock with a time announcement, then news, weather, an interview program, and some other stuff that Kirk never heard. Now listen."

The Inspector turned a switch. The plastic reels on the recorder slowly revolved and orchestral music filled the room, "Just sixteen minutes before that three o'clock time announcement — at exactly 2:44 — we get this. Listen."

The symphony was Haydn's, but suddenly a quiet passage exploded as though Honegger or Copland had tampered with the score. A shot blasted from the speaker. Softly, serenely the strings continued for a bar or two. Another shot cracked out and the music flowed imperturbably on. A third time the invisible gun spoke and, after a longer interval, twice more. A distant horn piped faintly and the brasses slowly began to come to life. Then came another sound — as unexpected as the shots but with a different quality, distinctly recognizable — the sudden, forceful slam of a door.

A moment later Gavigan turned the switch and the music stopped in mid bar.

"We got the station program director up here," he said, "with the tape they made for their file. It's exactly the same, except no shots. This tape was made this afternoon and Kirk was shot by someone who came quietly through that door at exactly 2:44, started shooting before Kirk could open his mouth, fired five times, then left, slammed the door — and vanished. Or walked out past the F.B.I.-men without being seen. What I want to know . . ."

"Wait," Merlini broke in. "Not so many conclusions all at once. I'm beginning to suspect your invisible man may be a close relative of the phantom woodchopper." The magician crossed to the tape recorder and looked down at it. "Suppose," he said slowly, "I shot Kirk *before* the radio program began. Then I put a clean tape on the recorder — clean except for an inch or two halfway through on which I have *already recorded* five shots and the slamming of a door. I turn on the radio and recorder and ease out, being careful

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not to slam the door on my exit. Then I establish my alibi — by keeping an appointment for a voice lesson at Carnegie Hall."

There was complete silence.

Then Gavigan spoke. "She didn't dare record only one shot in advance — she knew she might miss. And that's why she put two slugs into Kirk's back after he'd fallen — the number of shots had to match what was already on the tape."

Ryan shook his head. "A good try, gentlemen; but it won't work. As they record, these machines automatically erase anything already on the tape."

"Do we know this one does that?" Merlini asked. "Kirk was an engineer and I never met one yet who could resist revamping a piece of equipment. For that matter, a singer like June Barlow could know enough about tape recorders to —"

"It'll take about two minutes to find out," Gavigan said. "We simply put on a clean tape, record something, rewind, and record again."

Ryan was already doing it. He spoke briefly, "Testing, one, two, testing, one, two." Then he rewound the tape, whistled a few bars of *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, rewound once more, and played it back. Both recordings were there, one superimposed on the other.

"Well," Gavigan said. "That was a lucky guess that paid off."

"Lucky guess, my antenna!" Merlini objected. "As soon as I heard the shots on that tape I knew they hadn't been recorded at the same time Kirk was killed."

"I don't believe it," Gavigan said. "I've heard that tape half a dozen times. There's nothing on it that tells you that."

Merlini grinned. "That's right. Nothing. Something that should be there — isn't."

What did The Great Merlini mean by "nothing"? What was the clue by which Merlini solved the murder of Jerome Kirk?

Mail your solution at once to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York . . . $250 in cash prizes for the 31 best solutions . . . and let us know if you wish these contests continued.

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

With each new story that he writes, John F. Suter tackles a bigger and more difficult theme. Actually, the subject matter of Mr. Suter's "Your Word Against Mine" is so "touchy" that normally it would be taboo in most magazines, and especially in a family magazine. But the author has handled the problem — and it is a problem, a most distressing one — with such finesse that readers will feel a sense of revelation rather than revulsion. Mr. Suter's courage and honesty are matched by his good taste and restraint — in a field of criminological inquiry that is admittedly susceptible to the rawest sensationalism.

More power to one of the brightest prospects among EQMM's younger writers! John F. Suter is growing . . .

YOUR WORD AGAINST MINE

by JOHN F. SUTER

DEFENDING COUNSEL ROBERTS looked up from his notes as Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Sutherland got to his feet.

The ceiling fixtures in Intermediate Court cast a yellow light over the dark walnut courtroom. The tall windows were gray blanks as the last of winter dissolved in slow, monotonous March rain. The tiled corridors outside were sharp with carbolic smell, but in the overheated room a heavy odor of damp wool mingled with a bitter whiff of wet overshoes and umbrellas.

The spectators' benches were packed.

Roberts, watching his small, bald, ferret-faced opponent gather himself for his closing remarks, found the day and the situation in league against him. *You can't snoop out all the surprises. But what to do about the one they pull out of the hat, as in this case? What to do?* He knew that he must expect Sutherland to hit it hard. It had to be hit back. *Can I make it come through?* A sneeze at the rear of the courtroom reminded him of the cold he was developing, another weight to be added to the pressure on his brain.

Be sharp, Roberts, be sharp. Sutherland's already used one or two of your own tricks against you.

The defense lawyer looked at the child, hoping to surprise the malice that must be there, that must show itself, if only once — hoping that the jury would see it, too, when it did show. But her face was placid and in-

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nocent. He looked at her father. That craggy, ashes-colored face was no graven image. Anger and hatred ebbed and surged there, giving way to satisfaction as the prosecutor prepared to unmask the devil before the jury.

Roberts ignored the jury. He would get to them all too soon. He glanced at his client, Arthur Bradshaw, instead. Bradshaw — like his antagonist, the little girl — was utterly serene. His banner of prematurely white hair was smoothly brushed. His pink skin was unmarked save for the crow's-feet of humor at his blue eyes. All his lines were finely cut — face, hands, and even the bones of his legs and ankles, as Roberts knew. Bradshaw personified dignity. The thing at issue was the integrity behind the dignity.

And Roberts looked at himself. *It's all very well for Sutherland. He can be a machine if he likes. Strip another man to his bare bones, and if you've never had to open your own heart you won't mind it. My trouble is that I have too much heart. Wouldn't Bradshaw be better off if I didn't have an eleven-year-old girl myself?* He thought back to the clear windy day when, with the jury impaneled and ready to listen, it was time for the opening remarks. His mind's ear again heard Sutherland's dry, dusty voice addressing the twelve attentive jurors . . .

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury [Sutherland had said that first day of the trial], we are here to try a man accused of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. This is a case which I am most distressed to prosecute, because I am aware of the regard with which this community has held the defendant, Arthur Bradshaw."

Attempting to trump my ace already, Roberts had thought.

Sutherland had rubbed his bald head in affected embarrassment. "But in this life we cannot always do the things we should like to do. I am sure that my opponent, Mr. Roberts, would like it better if our positions were reversed because, as some of you may know, while I am unmarried he is a father. His natural inclination in this case must be to prosecute, not defend.

"I feel a great responsibility in this case. A responsibility to Virginia May Tucker — to her parents — to everyone in our community. For this could be a crime against any child in town, not just Virginia May Tucker. The defense counsel's child, for instance. Or *your* child." He threw one arm out in Bradshaw's direction, but did not mention him by name. "So I want you, friends, not to look upon me as a prosecutor in this case, but as a defender — a defender of the things we all cherish most: our homes, our families, our children. Think to yourselves, ladies and gentlemen: Have you ever regarded the Prosecuting Attorney's office as your defender?"

Sutherland had paused to wipe the sweat delicately from his palms. "Now, I do not wish you ladies and gentlemen of the jury to imagine that I intend to introduce evidence to show that Arthur Bradshaw is the man

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who has been trying to lure other little girls into his car — the man the police have hunted for months.

(*No, damn you,* Roberts had said to himself, *but you can play on their prejudices. Who hasn't read about that animal?* Then he had remembered his own Bessie and the constant worry that she might not heed his and June's warnings.)

"The evidence we shall introduce is concerned only with the question: Did Arthur Bradshaw make advances to the Tucker child, or did he not? You must consider this, and this alone. If you are satisfied that he did — and we shall attempt to prove that he did — then you must find him guilty as charged.

"We shall attempt to show —"

After a time Roberts had been on his feet himself, facing the jury for his own opening. He knew exactly how he had looked standing there — six feet two, broad-shouldered, high-cheekboned, one lock of black hair falling boyishly over his left eyebrow — a picture of the clean young defender of the wronged. A picture Roberts had tried to preserve across the years.

But he always forgot this picture when he began to speak. It never failed to surprise him, when he spoke to a jury, that these people were no more than his own neighbors. The owlish banker, Martin — foreman of the jury — was like Joe Hazleton, the insurance man who lived across the street. The pleasant-faced brunette in the second row could be a sister of the soda fountain girl in the neighborhood drug store. The stocky man sitting beside her could double for the meat-cutter in the supermarket. These were just people, bent on seeking an answer as best they knew how. And he had spoken to them as people, not as an audience. *If I'm to save or break a man by talking, I can't be a performer, I must be a communicant. I must communicate with these twelve people.*

"I must confess to you, ladies and gentlemen, that in his opening speech Mr. Sutherland has given us all something to think about — especially me. And he has shown me that I ought to look at this case not only as an attorney, but as a father. For, as Mr. Sutherland has said, in so many words: What if this were *your* child? That is a terrible question to have to answer.

"Ladies and gentlemen, terrible as that question is, I must ask you to try to answer one equally terrible: What if you stood in Arthur Bradshaw's place?"

He had paused a moment, to let it sink in. *That's one for our foreman to think about.*

"By that question, ladies and gentlemen, I do not mean the familiar one: What if I were sitting there, on trial for murder — or some other crime? The question, rather, is: What if it were I, about to see my whole life wrecked, my good name torn to shreds, by someone's false testimony? For, ladies and gentlemen, is it not more terrible to strip a man of everything he is, and then let him live, than to take his life?

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"I shall attempt to show, beyond question, that my client's life is as unblemished as you can expect any average man's to be — probably more. Such a man is inevitably the target of people who cannot tolerate the good among us, who must continually look for flaws in them. It is a tribute to Arthur Bradshaw that I have had dozens of offers from persons who want to testify for him. I could fill this courtroom with such character witnesses. If a time should ever come when I were on trial, I should be proud to have so many plead to speak in my behalf. Some of these people will tell you their stories later . . ."

Roberts leaned across the table toward Bradshaw.

"Look again. Do you see anyone here who might have a grudge against you?"

Bradshaw said calmly, "But I have never given anyone cause to have a grudge."

The lawyer reddened. "That's not the point! People bear grudges whether you've given them reason or not. All they need is imagination. And the more well-known you are, the more they imagine. Now, will you at least try to help me? Will you please look?"

Bradshaw scanned the courtroom. "I don't see anyone who might fit your description."

Roberts leaned closer and spoke in an intense undertone. "One thing Sutherland might do is to have someone swear that you've tried this sort of thing before. If you saw anybody here who might say that, it would help me to have some background on him."

"I don't see anyone."

Roberts thought: *So, if it comes, it'll catch me flatfooted. Well —.*

The voice cut through their conversation: "Will Virginia May Tucker come to the stand?"

As the child rose and made her way to the stand, Roberts stared in surprise. *The first witness? No warm-up, no preliminary witnesses?* He hardly heard them getting the child to affirm the truth of her testimony. *Is Sutherland hitting for the deepest impression by putting the child first? Or does it mean that he has no supporting witnesses — as Bradshaw said?*

The child should make a good impression . . .

There was nothing falsely angelic about her features; they were only a little better than plain. Her light brown hair, which would later be mouse-colored, tended to be straight, but no false crimps had been put into it. Carefully placed barrettes caused it to fall softly, just far enough back from the face to create an image of placidness and honesty. Her blue print dress was faded and mended; but it was clean, and the needlework was neat.

The prosecutor spoke gently. Roberts said to himself: *He sounds like an old uncle played by a ham actor.* But juries weren't drama critics. It was always effective.

"Now, Virginia May, tell these

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ladies and gentlemen, how old are you?"

"Eleven." The childish voice was faint.

"I'm afraid not many of us heard you, honey. Try to talk a little louder."

"I'm eleven years old. Last June."

"And you live with your mother and daddy, do you?"

"That's right."

"And go to Sunday School?"

"Yessir, at St. John's. Nearly every Sunday, except sometimes when the weather's bad."

The prosecutor reached into his pocket and pulled out a small book.

"Do you recognize this, Virginia May?"

"Yessir. That's my New Testament. I got it for not missing Sunday School a single time for six months."

Roberts rose and addressed the judge. "Your Honor, this is a pleasant interlude, I am sure, but I hardly think that we are here to find out how well the child knows her catechism. I suggest that this testimony be stricken and such questioning be left to her Sunday School teacher."

Sutherland smiled ironically. "Your Honor, I think it unfair to assume that the defendant has a character, while this little girl has none." He turned to the jury, held out the Bible, shrugged, and smiled again. Roberts fought to keep from reddening at the pantomime criticism: *What manner of adversary is antagonistic to a child's religion?*

Judge Weaver, a very short, very hairy, very gray man, glanced from beneath shaggy brows at both attorneys. "You have a point, Mr. Sutherland. The testimony may stand. However, I suggest you get on with your case."

Sutherland nodded and turned to the child. "What grade are you in at school, Virginia May?"

"Fifth. Miss Kincaid."

"Have your schoolteachers ever tried to teach you right from wrong?"

"Yessir. All of them. Miss Temple, in the fourth grade, was *always* going on about how we ought to do this and ought not to do that."

The prosecutor rubbed the side of his face, then the top of his head, a picture of discomfort. "Now, Virginia May, I want you to tell these people exactly what happened on October 8th. Don't be afraid. Just speak out."

The child folded her hands in her lap and began speaking to the judge. "I was —"

Judge Weaver interrupted her, speaking quietly. "You must not turn to me, my dear. Those people over there won't be able to hear you. Speak to them."

She turned to the jury. "I was downtown that day, and I guess I got interested in looking in the dime store too long. All at once I saw by the clock at Moore's Jewelry that I'd better be getting home. So I went to the bus stop and was waiting there. I guess a bus had gone just before that, because I was the first one there."

Sutherland interrupted tenderly.

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"You were standing there alone, honey?"

"Yessir. By myself. Well, I wasn't there very long when this car drove up and stopped. It was a blue car, all nice and shiny and clean. I guess it wasn't new, but it did look nice. The man in it leaned over and opened the door and called to me. He said: I'm *going east, little girl, and I'll give you a ride if you want.*"

"And you got in with him right away?"

"No, sir, not right away. I'd been told not to. I knew it was wrong, but I thought about being late. And I'd always thought that bad men were dirty and ugly. He wasn't. His car was pretty, and he looked nice. So then I got in."

"And then what happened, Virginia May?"

"We started off. He asked me my name and how old I was and things about school. He told me that I was a nice little girl. He asked me where I lived. He acted real friendly. Then, when we got to Plum Street — that's about five blocks from home — he started asking me if I wouldn't like to have a box of candy, all for myself. He said he had one there in that little place in the front of the car. He opened the little door and showed me. I said, well, maybe I would. Then he said was I in a hurry to get home. I said, yes, I was. He said oh my mother wouldn't mind, let's go for a ride, say out to Media Park. I said no, I had to get home. He kept coaxing, and next thing I knew we were going right past the street where I live. I told him about it, but he didn't seem to hear. When I said it again, and he didn't stop, I got scared. I reached over and turned that key there on the dashboard and pulled the key out and threw it on the floor. The motor quit and he had to stop the car to reach down for the key. I jumped out of the car real quick and ran home. It was about four blocks back by that time. My Mom and Dad were there and I looked scared, I guess, so they got out of me what had happened. Dad got awful mad, and he found out who it was after I gave him the license number of the car. And that's all."

Prosecutor Sutherland pulled at his nose. "Would you know the man who gave you the ride if you were to see him again?"

"Yessir." She stood up and pointed at Arthur Bradshaw. "That's him."

Bradshaw shook his head and smiled ruefully to Roberts.

"Poor child," he murmured. "To misuse her this way, so young."

Roberts did not reply. He was listening intently.

Sutherland spoke to the child again. "Virginia May, what fraction of a pound is one ounce?"

She puzzled, worrying her lower lip with her teeth. "One-eighth?"

He smiled gently. "No, it's one-sixteenth."

"Oh."

He leaned toward her. "Now, honey, another man wants to ask you some questions." He nodded to Roberts. "Your witness."

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Roberts approached the stand almost gingerly. *This could blow up in my face any minute*, he thought. He looked at the unsmiling, slightly apprehensive little face. *She could be my own little Bessie. No, not Bessie. Think of her as Joan, the two-faced one from the next block, the liar and trouble-maker, the one who runs back and forth with the she-said-this-about-you tales.*

"Virginia May, I am glad to find that you are so good about going to Sunday School. Do you know how God looks upon people who don't tell the truth?"

"Yessir. They're sinners. He punishes them."

"You don't want to be a sinner, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Then we don't need to worry about anything you tell me."

The child looked at him skeptically. "No — sir."

"Have you any brothers or sisters, Virginia May?"

"I have a brother that's older and a brother and sister that're younger."

"Four children in your family, then?"

"Yessir."

"What does your daddy do?"

"I'm not sure—"

"What is his work?"

The prosecutor jumped to his feet. "Your Honor, I object! There is a deliberate attempt here to create prejudice against a man who is less fortunate than others!"

Roberts turned to the judge with surprise stamped on his face. "Your Honor, such reasoning had not crossed my mind. I should be the first to affirm the thesis that all men are equal in a court of law. If Mr. Sutherland had listened to my opening, he would now realize that this is the very point I want to make in this trial. My present object is different. May I proceed?"

"You may proceed."

Roberts addressed the girl again. "I'll ask you again, Virginia May, what is your daddy's work?"

"He's a foreman on the night shift at the Iron Works."

"What time does he go to work?"

"Three in the afternoon."

"Do you see much of him?"

"Mostly just on Saturdays and Sundays. He's usually asleep when I go to school, and he's gone when I get home."

Roberts half turned to the jury and said only, "I see." He paused.

Then he said, "Virginia May, what day of the week was October 8th?"

She hesitated. "Why — it was a Thursday, wasn't it?"

Roberts stepped quickly to the table where he had been sitting and picked up a calendar he had spread out there. He returned and showed it to the child. "Thursday is right."

He turned and showed the calendar to the jury, giving them time to look it over. Then he rolled it up swiftly.

"Thursday, October 8th. Is that a school holiday?"

She made no answer. He leaned closer.

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"Virginia May, was there a holiday that day?"

She looked at Judge Weaver. He nodded sternly. "You must answer, child."

A small voice: "No, sir."

Not asking her to repeat, Roberts said, full-voiced, "You say it was not a holiday. Why were you downtown, then? Why weren't you in school?"

Her hands twisted. "Mom asked me to go down to buy some things for her."

"Oh, your mother asked you. I see. That would make it all right."

"Yes — sir."

"Your daddy wouldn't have any reason to be angry, then, if you came home when you were supposed to be in school? Not if your mother had asked you to go shopping downtown."

"No, sir. I guess not."

"By the way — you weren't carrying any packages when you got into Mr. Bradshaw's car, were you?"

"No, sir," she said quickly. "I couldn't find what my mother wanted."

"All right, Virginia May, I won't ask any more questions. That's all."

He turned and walked away.

Bradshaw whispered to him, "I'm glad you weren't too hard on the poor little thing."

Roberts frowned. "She's a chronic liar. And her lying can ruin you. I'd like to shake her until her teeth rattle."

"I still feel that you should have let me discuss this thing with the child and her parents. It might never have come to this. That little one will remember this all the rest of her life."

Roberts leaned close to Bradshaw and spoke earnestly. "Right. I *want* her to remember it. If she's not headed off now, there's no telling. . . . Look! You never had any kids. Sure, you've worked with boys for years, but you see only the good side of them. Kids can be the worst liars on earth. But we have to be careful to handle this one just right. If she goes to pieces in front of the jury —"

Prosecutor Sutherland's dusty voice said, "Will Alfred Tucker take the stand, please."

Roberts settled back and studied the child's father as he took the oath. Short, burly, with mouse-colored hair shot with gray and a seamed skin robbed of color by a lifetime of sunless foundry work, Tucker faced the court defiantly.

The prosecutor leaned toward him.

"Your full name, please."

"Alfred Charles Tucker."

Sutherland glanced at the jury. "Ever mistaken for Alfred J. Tucker?"

Tucker snorted. "The head of the bus company? Are you kidding?"

"What is your occupation?"

"Just like my kid said — foreman at Moore Iron Works."

"What are your hours there, Mr. Tucker?"

"Three to eleven — the night shift."

"That doesn't give you much time with your children, does it, Mr. Tucker?"

"No. Hardly any."

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"But in spite of that, you think your children ought to be brought up properly. Is that correct?"

"That's right! I'll have none of my kids hoppin' from one gutter to another. If they're not brought up right, it'll be no fault of me and Sade."

"By the way, Mr. Tucker, your wife isn't here to testify because she's so upset by what happened that she's in bed under a doctor's care? Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Tucker, you've heard Mr. Roberts suggest that you pay very little attention to your children. Is that true?"

Tucker's face darkened. "That's a lie! Sure I'm not around much because of my hours at the Works, but when I'm home it's the kids first and other things second."

Sutherland coughed. "I'm sure of that, Mr. Tucker. Now, suppose you tell us what happened at your home on October 8th."

Virginia May's father frowned. "It was about 2:30 in the afternoon. I was getting ready to leave for work. I'd just picked up my lunch box when the front door bangs open and Ginnie comes running in, all out of breath. It's not time for her to be out of school, and she doesn't look so good, so I ask her what's wrong. She tells me about this guy giving her a lift and trying to pull some funny stuff on her. This makes me see red, and I'm all for going to look up this guy, but she says he drove off in a hurry. And, anyway, she remembers his license number. So I tell the cops and give 'em the number. So after a while they ask the kid to identify this guy and his car, and that's it. That's him, all right."

Sutherland glanced at the jury. "Did you ever know Mr. Arthur Bradshaw? Ever work for him?"

"Never laid eyes on him before in my life. Read in the papers about him from time to time, but hardly enough to remember."

"Anyone in your family, or your wife's family, ever know him before?"

"No, sir. Not a one."

Roberts got to his feet. "Objection. Such matters would be pure hearsay on the part of the witness."

"Sustained."

Sutherland smiled. "Very well. But you *did* have Arthur Bradshaw's auto license number."

"That's right. The kid gave it to me. That's the way the cops found him."

Sutherland smiled again. "Your witness, Mr. Roberts."

Roberts opened with a calm he did not feel. "You're a foreman at the Iron Works, I believe you said, Mr. Tucker?"

Tucker's animosity was ill-concealed. *You say I don't take care of my own kid! You're on the side of this Bradshaw! We'll see!*

His answer was a growl. "I am."

"You work eight hours as a rule, exclusive of overtime?"

"That's right."

"Heavy work?"

"It's a man's work and then some."

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"Takes lots of sleep?"

"It does that. I don't usually roll in before midnight, and it's 10–11 next morning before I'm up."

"What time did you get up on October 8th?"

"I don't remember for sure. About 10 or 11, like I said."

"Did you see Virginia May before afternoon?"

"No, not till about 2:30."

Roberts became almost apologetic. "Mr. Sutherland implied that I cast doubt on your responsibility as a father — that I thought you paid little attention to your children. He misconstrued the questions I asked your little girl. I realize that you only have limited time to give your children, and I think this jury should realize it. That *is* right, isn't it, that you have only limited time?"

Some of the antagonism left Tucker's face. The harsh lines relaxed.

"Yes, sir. Like I told him, I do the best I can in the time I've got."

"But, of course, Mr. Tucker, in the very little time you do have at home, you let the children know their father's around?"

"That I do. They'd run all over their mother if I didn't make 'em toe the mark."

"You're strict with them, then?"

"I am. I'm not ashamed of it. Those kids'll be brought up right."

"In what way are you strict, Mr. Tucker? How do you discipline your children when you feel they need disciplining?"

"I tan their hides good. A taste of the belt works best of anything I know."

Roberts nodded gratefully, and the last trace of Tucker's antagonism vanished. "By the way, Mr. Tucker. Your daughter Virginia May said she wasn't in school the day all this happened because her mother asked her to go downtown. That's so, of course? Her mother did ask her?"

"I guess she did, if Ginnie says so."

"Oh, I see, you haven't checked that with Mrs. Tucker," Roberts said worriedly. "I see . . . Mr. Tucker, what if Ginnie *hadn't* been asked to go downtown that day? By your wife, I mean?"

Tucker glowered. "You mean what if she'd cut school? Why, I'd have blistered her —" He stopped suddenly.

Roberts turned away. "That's all."

He sat down and glanced thoughtfully over his notes. A glimmering of Sutherland's still-to-come attack was beginning to appear. *Can I head him off? Or neutralize it if I can't head him off?*

Roberts was still turning the matter over when Sutherland said, "We intend to call no more witnesses, Your Honor."

Roberts stared in disbelief, unable to fathom Sutherland's motive. But it would help, it would help. It gave his own planned opening move a legitimate excuse.

"Your Honor," he said, rising, "the defense is unprepared for such a brief presentation by Mr. Sutherland, I must confess. If Your Honor please,

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I should like a fifteen-minute recess to confer with our witnesses."

Judge Weaver bobbed his gray head. "Court will take a fifteen-minute recess."

Roberts faced the courtroom, speaking loudly. "Before anyone leaves, I should like to meet in the judge's chambers with Mr. Bradshaw's witnesses."

Twenty-two persons rose. It looked as though most of the courtroom were emptying. Impressive.

Roberts smiled faintly as he watched the faces of the jury.

After the recess seven witnesses in succession took the stand and testified to Bradshaw's high character. Some had known him since boyhood. They said that Arthur Bradshaw was a wealthy man of fine family who had devoted most of his life to youth work; that he had built the city's playground program nearly single-handed; that he had been a leading vestryman of his church for 26 years; that he had held office after office in charity and civic drives, all without compensation; that he had been on the board of directors of the YMCA; that although he had no children, he had been happily married for almost 30 years; that he was never known to drink; that he had never been charged with anything more serious than a ticket for overtime parking.

The prosecution found no loopholes. The witnesses were unimpeachable.

Roberts was about to call his eighth witness when Judge Weaver leaned over the bench.

"Mr. Roberts, how many character witnesses do you have?"

"Twenty-two, Your Honor."

"I shall ask that the fact be noted. However, I think it unnecessary that the jury hear them all. I shall limit you to one more witness of this type, as I am permitted by law. I am sure you understand."

"Yes, Your Honor."

"You may proceed."

The eighth witness hammered home the spiritual side of Bradshaw's character. This one, Bradshaw's pastor, one of the city's most prominent clergymen, likewise could not be shaken by Sutherland's respectful probing.

The judge glanced at the clock. "Gentlemen, the hour is getting late. Court will recess until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning."

Roberts had begun the next day's session by calling a schoolteacher, Anna Temple, to the stand. She was an excellent witness, with a firmness of manner and tone that overlay the appearance of innocence her small size, round face, and wide eyes gave her. Her hair was a pale red — not a deep enough shade to warn off the unwary.

Roberts was matter-of-fact. "Miss Temple, what is your occupation?"

"Schoolteacher."

"At which school?"

"Walnut Street."

"What grade do you teach?"

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"Fourth."

"Have you ever had Virginia May Tucker as a pupil?"

"Ginnie Tucker was in my room last year."

"What sort of student would you say Virginia May was?"

"What I would call average." Miss Temple glanced at Sutherland, who was rising from his chair, and her green eyes flashed. "By that I mean that she was neither very dull nor very bright. She was like so many of the rest of us." And the prosecutor sat down again, choosing to smile.

Roberts smiled, too. Then he went on: "How would you characterize her ability to learn, Miss Temple? Did she memorize readily?"

The answer was emphatic and precise. "She did *not* memorize readily, Mr. Roberts. Virginia May had to work for the things she learned."

Roberts next question was more a plea for advice. "Miss Temple, would you say that Virginia May Tucker was a well-adjusted child?"

"Not altogether."

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh — for instance — she often made a fuss about some possession of hers being 'missing.' She would tell me this not in private, but before the whole class. *Someone took my ruler.* Or, *My box of crayons is gone, and somebody's got it. Somebody, somebody* — you know? So we'd stop class and look. Invariably the missing object would be found in her own desk."

"Have you any idea why she did this, Miss Temple?"

Sutherland's quick "Object!" was suppressed by the teacher's equally quick, "I'll leave that to a psychologist, Mr. Roberts."

Judge Weaver looked at Sutherland. "Does the Prosecution still object?"

Sutherland waved handsomely. "We withdraw the objection, Your Honor." He had suddenly decided not to tangle with the red-haired Miss Temple.

Roberts asked carefully, "How was Virginia May's attendance record, Miss Temple?"

"Very poor during the year I had her. One more absence without a legitimate excuse, and she would not have been promoted."

"These were mostly willful absences, not for illness or other permissible reasons?"

"That is correct."

"What reasons did she give you for these willful absences?"

"She made up fanciful stories and stuck to them."

Still carefully, Roberts asked, "You mean Virginia May lied to you when she did wrong, and stuck to her lies?"

"About her absences, yes."

Roberts said gently, "She lied to you, and stuck to her lies. That's all, thank you, Miss Temple." He looked at Sutherland. "Your witness."

Sutherland's cross-examination was obvious. Lying was a common trait in children, Miss Temple admitted. So was rebellion at confinement in schools. Yes, even the finest children rebelled and lied sometimes. Yes,

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otherwise Ginnie Tucker was a well-behaved child. Yes, Miss Temple had taught other children who were far bigger headaches. And so on.

Roberts merely said: "I now call Ethel Kincaid."

Ethel Kincaid was another teacher, but tall and bony with iron-gray hair and quick, black eyes.

"What grade do you teach, Miss Kincaid?"

"Fifth."

"Which school?"

"Walnut Street."

"Do you know Virginia May Tucker?"

"She's one of my pupils."

"Tell us what you know of her."

"Well, I've been sitting back there listening to Anna Temple. I see no need to add to or change anything she's said. Of course, I haven't had the child in my room for more than a few months, so perhaps I'm being unfair."

"But, in general, you confirm Miss Temple's testimony?"

"Yes. Of course the absences — maybe it's too early to tell. But there does seem to be a trend — a definite trend already."

Roberts glanced aside. The child's face was expressionless; her father's was mottled in anger.

"Now, Miss Kincaid, please tell me what you remember about October 8th and what Virginia May did on that day."

The teacher's features drew together in concentration. "It was a beautiful day, as I recall — real Indian summer. I remember the leaves on the maple by the schoolroom window were beginning to fall, and the class seemed far more interested in watching them than paying attention to me. The Tucker child had come in that morning acting very listless. It was particularly hard to keep her attention. Late in the morning I noticed that she had her head pillowed on her arm. She said she felt sick, and I sent her to the school nurse. The nurse reported that the child had no temperature, but of course was to be excused if she said she was not feeling well. I wrote a note to Mrs. Tucker and sent Virginia May home."

"This was about what time, Miss Kincaid?"

"It was around 11."

"And that was all you saw of Virginia May that day?"

"That's correct."

"And she was back in school next day?"

"Yes — and quite a different young lady," said Miss Kincaid dryly. "As chipper as you please. Completely recovered."

Roberts turned to the jury, raised a knowing eyebrow, and smiled. "Your witness," he said to Sutherland.

Sutherland approached the stand, looking thoughtful.

"Miss Kincaid, Miss Temple has testified that in her class last year Virginia May was just an average student. What she learned was by experience, not by memorizing. Is that your impression, also?"

"Substantially, yes."

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"Now, Miss Kincaid, you said that on the day in question this child appeared to be ill, so ill that she had put her arm on her desk and pillowed her head on that arm?"

She answered calmly, "That is correct."

"You also said that you sent the child home. You mentioned no one's accompanying her. Are we to infer that she went alone?"

Miss Kincaid drew herself up. "She insisted on it. Begged us not to call her mother, as her mother might be frightened. Since there was no sign of anything seriously wrong with her, and she lives very near the school, I allowed her to go home alone."

Sutherland threw up his hands. "What kind of teachers do we have who let a sick child make her way along the public streets *alone?*" He walked away. "That's all."

As Miss Kincaid retired to her seat, face flushed, Roberts arose. "I shall ask Arthur Bradshaw to take the stand."

The buzz in the spectators' section had not yet subsided when Bradshaw, a striking figure, was sworn and sat down. The light gleamed on his fine white hair.

"Mr. Bradshaw," said Roberts quietly, "please tell us what happened on October 8th."

Bradshaw spoke in a clear, controlled voice.

"Certainly. I assume you want details bearing only on this — incident. I was downtown that day, buying two footballs at the Sports Center. The city playground touch-football league was just getting under way, and replacements for two old footballs were needed. I bought them and was starting to take them out to Jack Shields, our activities director, when I saw the Tucker child standing on the corner. She looked rather woebegone — worried-looking, I thought. I hate to see a child unhappy, so I stopped and offered her a lift. She accepted. We talked of a few general things. When we reached a point about four blocks from where she lives — as I now know — she asked me to let her out. I did. Why she got out there, I don't know. That evening the police came to question me, and the next thing I knew I was charged with this — this offense."

"Mr. Bradshaw, let's get this clear: You say that *you* stopped the car to let the child out?"

"Yes. As soon as she asked. But, as I say, I have no idea why. At the time, I assumed she lived near where she asked me to let her out."

"Is it true that you offered her candy?"

Bradshaw smiled. "Oh, yes. I always carry a box or two in my glove compartment. I've never met a boy or girl who doesn't like candy. She took some, too."

Virginia May jumped to her feet.

"That's not true! That's a big lie, and he knows it! I didn't even touch his old candy!"

Judge Weaver rapped sharply, and Alfred Tucker pulled his child back to her seat. The judge looked at

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Tucker and spoke evenly: "Sir, your child's testimony has been heard. Please restrain her. I will not have this sort of thing in my court!"

"Yes, Your Honor." Tucker's expression wavered between embarrassment and indignation. He muttered fiercely to Virginia May, who shrank back defiantly.

Roberts nodded to Bradshaw. "Please continue, Mr. Bradshaw."

"Why, that's all there is," said Bradshaw, spreading his hands slightly. "The incident was so trivial that I almost forgot it. If the officers had not come to my home so soon afterward with a warrant — on this ridiculous charge — I would not have remembered it at all."

Roberts gestured to Sutherland. "Mr. Sutherland."

Sutherland walked slowly around Bradshaw, looking him up and down. Time ticked by as he looked. Finally, he spoke," Mr. Bradshaw, your witnesses would have us believe that you're a living saint. You'll pardon my curiosity. I've never seen a saint in the flesh, and I want to remember you. Answer me this question: Even assuming that you've led the blameless life they say you have, have you never heard that men can change in their ways? In their later years?"

In his seat, counsel for the defense closed his eyes. *Here it comes.*

Bradshaw replied courteously, "I certainly make no claim to being anything but human, sir. I have heard of what you say, yes. As far as it would apply to me, it is untrue."

Sutherland leaned close to him. "Can you prove that?"

Roberts was on his feet. "Objection. Your Honor, Mr. Bradshaw is not required to prove the truth or falsity of such a gratuitous allegation."

"Sustained!" The judge was not young, either.

Sutherland said suddenly, "What's the license number of your car, Bradshaw?"

"23309 — no, 233084J."

Sutherland smiled. "Not easy to remember, is it?"

Bradshaw reddened slightly. "Not under circumstances such as these."

Sutherland turned toward the jury. "*Virginia May remembered it!*"

Defending counsel Roberts looked up from his notes as Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Sutherland got to his feet and turned to the jury to make his summation.

Roberts jerked his thoughts back from the past with an effort. Days of this, and now it was approaching the climax.

He looked at Bradshaw's face, hoping to find in its calm a release from his own worries. But the serenity and confidence he saw there only caused him to reflect, *Doesn't he realize? Is it real — or only pose? In a few minutes from now, Sutherland can . . .*

Sutherland began, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you may wonder why the prosecution has made its case so very simple. The answer is that it *is* a simple case. That being so, why should I complicate it for you?

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"We have here a situation in which there are no direct witnesses for either side. We have only the testimony of an innocent little girl on the one hand, and a grown man who has lived the best part of his life on the other. No other person, adult or child, was present. No person saw Virginia May get into Bradshaw's car, no person saw her get out — or, at least, no one has come forward so to testify.

"You have listened to a great many witnesses giving Arthur Bradshaw, a wealthy and prominent man, glowing character references. You have heard attempts to darken the character of the young victim, to make her out a chronic liar, and worse — a shameful heaping of insult on injury! All this adds up to a *complex* attempt on the part of the defense to make a case. You may ask yourself *why*? The People's case is simple and direct. We have complete faith in the integrity of this child, and her good, hard-working parents, without a great parade of witnesses. And so, I think, have you."

Sutherland pursued his original attack along several variations of this theme of simplicity, with flanking references to the iniquity of middle-aged men who prey on the young. It was clear that he was depending on the brevity of his speech and the innocence of childhood to carry the day.

Then the moment came that Roberts had been dreading.

"I want to call your attention to one further fact," said Sutherland. "You will recall that this man Bradshaw was traced by the police because little Virginia May remembered his auto license number. You will recall that this was no simple number — Bradshaw himself had trouble remembering it! Ah, but perhaps this child is a mathematical genius, a prodigy with figures? Hardly! When I asked her what fraction of a pound one ounce is, you heard her answer, 'One-eighth.' Besides, both of her teachers have said — witnesses for the defense, mind you! — that Virginia May is a poor memorizer. *What better proof of her story can anyone ask than that she remembered a complicated license number?*"

With that, the prosecutor sat down.

Now that he had actually heard it said, Roberts felt relieved. The die was cast. The question was: Whose version would the jury believe — Sutherland's or his?

He faced the jury, his expression as grave as he could make it. "Ladies and gentlemen, I repeat what I said in my opening: In these times there are far too many assaults on the integrity of blameless men who have a lifetime of good works behind them. This is the thing which faces us here. I will say no more about Mr. Bradshaw's character. You saw the caliber of people who testified to it; you heard what they had to say about him. Let us get down to cases.

"Mr. Sutherland has accurately stated that we have no witness to what took place in Mr. Bradshaw's car on October 8th. But we have had ample testimony as to some significant other events of that day. You have

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heard this child's teacher give sworn testimony that she sent Virginia May Tucker home because of an allegation of illness that was not borne out by the school nurse's examination. You have heard Alfred Tucker, her own father, testify that Virginia May did not arrive home until 2:30 in the afternoon — although she was sent home from school at 11 in the morning. But the child says her mother asked her to go downtown to do some shopping. Did Mrs. Tucker send a sick child downtown shopping? Obviously not. Then it must have been Virginia May's own idea to go downtown. But if she was not feeling well, why didn't she go straight home? I don't have to point out to you, ladies and gentlemen, the almost embarrassing contradictions in this child's testimony.

"You have heard both of Virginia May's most recent teachers testify as to her unreliable character — her lying, her record of unexcused absences. You have also heard Alfred Tucker admit that he deals out violent punishment to his children when they do wrong. Do you begin to see the truth?

"Is it not clear that Virginia May Tucker deliberately faked illness that day, and without her family's knowledge went downtown to window-shop or go to an early movie, after which she drove home through Arthur Bradshaw's kindness — and then realized she was getting home too early, that her father had not yet left for work and would want to know why she was home before school let out? Wasn't she counting on the long slow bus ride, with frequent stops, to get her home after her father had left? Didn't the speedier ride in Arthur Bradshaw's car destroy this plan of hers? *Don't you see that Virginia May invented this fairy tale about Mr. Bradshaw to divert attention from her own misconduct and to avoid punishment by the father she feared?*"

He scowled long and hard at all twelve of them. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, Mr. Sutherland has made much of the fact that this child, a poor memorizer, remembered a complicated auto license number. I ask you to think: *Isn't it far more likely that she made a special effort to remember that number just so her story would sound more convincing to her father?*"

Roberts paused, then said with weary repugnance, "Perhaps she also sought to gain attention as children just entering adolescence sometimes do, by the device of accusing an adult man of wrongdoing. An unpleasant thought; but, ladies and gentlemen, the defense did not make this case unpleasant."

Roberts thrust the clean, sharp lines of his face forward. "I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, I am a father of a child — a girl — the same age as this one. Had I not been convinced of Arthur Bradshaw's utter innocence, I would never have undertaken his defense."

The jury deliberated the rest of the day. Someone took Virginia May out

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of the courtroom, and she did not return. Her father sat stiff in his chair, doggedly seeing it through. Sutherland spent much of his time in conversation with the bailiff near one of the windows. The judge was busy going through a mound of papers. Bradshaw methodically read a packet of letters he had brought with him.

Roberts occupied his time organizing an army of notes he had made for an auto theft case which was pending. Concentration was intermittently difficult. At one point, the jury requested a transcript of the evidence. *What do they want to know? Aren't they convinced the child has lied? Or did I slip up somewhere?* He glanced at Bradshaw, calmly reading business letters. *He's the one who should be wondering. Does he still think it can't happen?*

The day wore on. Finally, it was clear that the jury would have to be locked up for the night.

Bradshaw leaned over and whispered to Roberts, "What do you think?"

Roberts shrugged. "I try not to." He stood up. "Not very successfully, I'm afraid."

The morning was sunny. The courtroom was jammed. At 10:25 A.M. the jury filed back into the jury box.

Judge Weaver leaned across the bench, his hands clasped. He addressed Martin, the foreman.

"Have you reached a verdict?"

Martin's owlish face assumed a look of exhausted pique.

"No, Your Honor, we have not."

The judge considered. "Mr. Martin, do you think that by further discussion the jury can arrive at a verdict?"

"We do not, Your Honor."

"How are you divided?"

Martin looked in Bradshaw's direction. "We stand eight to four for acquittal. This has not changed for nine hours. We were up all night."

Judge Weaver pursed his lips and nodded. Then he leaned back. "Very well. The jury is dismissed from this case. . . . The others — please report back here at the usual time tomorrow morning."

The courtroom was quiet. There was no sound of either gratification or sympathy.

The spectators drifted away in knots of twos and threes. Alfred Tucker, in a glowering group of friends and relatives, muttered with Sutherland. A number of Bradshaw's friends came up to express regrets and leave.

Roberts sat alone at the table, packing papers into his brief case. He looked ten years older this morning — far more worn than he had looked the night before. His hands were trembling a little.

"What's next?" It was Bradshaw, bending over him anxiously.

Roberts looked away. "They'll ask for a new trial."

"But I thought you couldn't try a man twice!"

Roberts glanced up briefly, then back at his brief case. "There was no verdict, Mr. Bradshaw."

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"You think that next time —?"

Roberts laid the brief case down and buckled it shut. Then he rose and looked directly into Bradshaw's eyes. "There won't be any next time — for me, I mean."

Bradshaw frowned. "You're quitting? You don't think you can beat them?"

Roberts said slowly, "The best thing you can do right now — and I should have insisted on it before I took the case — is to see a psychiatrist."

Bradshaw's face went bloodless suddenly.

Roberts said, "Four people on that jury didn't believe the kid lied about you — even though they may well have believed that she lied about other things.

"Well, Bradshaw, they were right. I didn't see it till I got home last night.

"Bradshaw, both you and the girl made it clear that you didn't let her out near her home. She said she had to make you stop. You said you stopped where she asked. But it wasn't *near her home*. All right. Maybe somebody on the jury thought of it. I thought of it — too late — and that's why I don't want to go on with this. I'm a father, remember. Next time, Sutherland will think of it.

"Bradshaw, if that child wanted to avoid being punished by her father, it wasn't necessary for her to lie about you. She wasn't that close to her home. *She could have stayed away from her block until she was sure her father had gone to work.*"

NEXT MONTH . . .

Special Christmas — New Year's Issue of 15 complete stories, including:

Stanley Ellin's BROKER'S SPECIAL
Rex Stout's SANTA CLAUS BEAT
Charlotte Armstrong's THE HEDGE BETWEEN
Thomas Walsh's WILL YOU ALWAYS BE HELPING ME?
Kem Bennett's THE QUEER FISH

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Harry the drug salesman was peddling a new sleeping pill . . .

ONE WAY TO MEXICO

by LOUIS ESTE

"HELLO, THERE," HARRY SAID, closing the door quickly after him.

"Do you know what time it is?" Marge whined in answer. "It's nearly 12 o'clock."

He looked at her and thought what a doll she'd been six years ago. But that was six years ago. He placed his bag of drug samples on the table before answering, "Don't start any of your damn nagging. I'm sick of it!"

"And sick of me too." She turned to face him. "Go on — admit it!"

"Aw, cut it out, Marge. You're just nervous — nervous and shaky."

She sulked. "A lot you care. If I don't get some sleep soon, I'll go nuts. And it's all your fault!" Her voice was thick, and her eyes were swollen.

He picked up his hat and pulled it down over his right eye. "I can't go through this again," he said. "I'm taking out for Mexico."

"Mexico?" she laughed. "What could you do in Mexico?"

"Sell drugs, of course. They use 'em down there, or didn't you know?"

"You expect me to believe you're really going? Seriously?"

He pulled a long train ticket from his pocket. "One way."

She looked at it uncertainly, then snatched it away and tore it in half.

"That's doing no good." He shrugged. "I'll just get another one."

Her shoulders sagged.

"Listen to me, Harry," she pleaded. "We've fought before."

"Don't I know it? Too often. That's why I'm shoving off — now."

Marge's eyes dropped to the torn ticket in her hand, stared at it unseeingly. After a moment she looked up.

"Harry, are you absolutely sure you mean this?"

He nodded.

She pushed past him, grabbed the phone on the table.

"Operator," she said, "give me Spring six-three-one-hundred."

Harry's chin jerked up. He snatched the phone from her hand and slammed it down.

"That's police headquarters, you fool!"

Marge shrugged and moved back a step as she answered, "It doesn't matter. I can call any time."

"What are you talking about?" he asked as he turned to face her.

Marge lit a cigarette and smiled. "You know, I've gotten on to a couple of things about you lately, things like — Whitey."

For a moment he looked funny.

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Marge smiled up at him. "Know the name, don't you?"

Harry licked his lips.

"A couple of nights ago, Harry, this character came to the door. He wanted something from you — wanted it bad."

Harry snarled. "I'll fix that junky!"

"Exactly what he said about you. Said he'd fix you for cutting him off."

"He doesn't scare me. If he talks, he goes to jail and he knows it."

"Haven't you forgotten something?"

"What do you mean?"

"Me, Harry. The kid you're running out on, remember?"

His eyes widened. "You mean you'd do that to me?"

"Why shouldn't I? You said we're quits. You're nothing to me any more." She mashed out her cigarette and studied his face. "Dope peddler!"

"Not any more, Marge. I swear. I cut it out a month ago."

She began brushing her hair. "Afraid of cop trouble, eh?"

"No cop can lay a finger on me. I've been careful." He moved to her side, his voice troubled. "It was, well, suddenly I saw what a rotten thing I'd been up to."

"You're breaking my heart," she said coldly.

"Listen to me, Marge," he said anxiously. "This is serious, this is straight, believe me. I quit — cold. I had to clear out and start over again."

"So you quarreled with me, is that it?"

"Yes, I *had* to, don't you see? I had to make you think we were through. Don't you know I'd rather be dead than to have had you find out this rotten thing about me?" He moved closer and put an arm over her shoulder. "I'm glad you know now." He gave her a little hug. "It makes everything clear. It opens the way for us."

"Us?" she looked up hopefully.

"Of course. It means we can go away together. If you'll come with me." He gave her another little hug and brought his head affectionately close to hers.

"Oh, Harry, you really mean it?"

"Don't I sound like it?" He gave her shoulder a quick squeeze and grinned. "Look, we'll get a new start and live like real people. Mexico's a wonderful place."

Marge began sniffing and smiling at Harry. His eyes softened. He wiped away the tears with his finger and kissed her lightly. "That's my doll."

"Look," he glanced at his watch, "it's late. I'll get the tickets changed and we've got to pack. You'd better get some sleep."

"You know I can't sleep."

He went to his bag and extracted a small bottle.

"This'll do the trick," he said and shook a white pellet from the bottle into her outstretched hand. "It's a new sedative, strong but harmless." She looked at it curiously. Harry went to the table, filled a glass with water from a decanter, and handed

(*concluded on page 121*)

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Virginia Bernheim's "Friday the 13th" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. It is a breezy, lilting story written by a Colorado housewife about "another housewife" who has a positive flair for trouble; as one reader commented, "Mrs. Bernheim has more zing than a bottle of fizz."

The author wrote us that "her greatest thrill was kissing her first baby — but selling my first story runs a mighty close second." Well, Mrs. Bernheim is obviously a woman chock-full of enthusiasm — so we'll make due allowances for her effervescent spirits and thank her just the same. She went on to say: "Yesterday morning was pretty dreadful. I sent my oldest son off to college once more (his senior year at Brown). I don't care how many times you see them go, it still feels like tearing a fingernail out by the roots. Then I let my husband off at the Elks Club, tore out to the Canon and let young Dan off for his Boy Scout hike. On the way home I stopped at the mail box as a mere formality. We never expect to get anything except bills for blood transfusions [you can see that the Bernheim household lives dangerously!]. Then I found the letter from you, accepting my first story . . . I never seem to cry delicately like other women — my nose drips."

Well, we'd sure like to meet Mrs. Bernheim and her family — they sound like more fun than a barrel of monkeys. And so now you have some inkling of what might have happened to Mrs. Bernheim the Friday she went to shop at Blue's Supermarket — just a simple, ordinary shopping trip on a Friday, except that it was Friday the 13th . . .

FRIDAY THE 13TH

by VIRGINIA BERNHEIM

DEAR CHUCK: AFTER ALL, DEAR, you didn't need to send the clipping. I saw it before you did and it caused plenty of trouble around here, particularly with your father. And incidentally, I'm not going to send the *Gazette* to you when you go back to school next year. You never read it when you're here but, when it's sent to you, you pick out the most extraordinary things to comment on. Like that time last year — I did not

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break up the council meeting at all; I simply made a sotto voce remark and those cockeyed acoustics in the place picked it up and made a big thing out of it. They didn't throw me out, either. They simply had to adjourn the meeting because two of the council members had mild cases of hysterics.

And another thing, when Andrus reported that I was hailed before the magistrate for failure to restrain a minor — I wasn't. I just went down and explained what happened. Jim didn't know he was going to start a rock slide when he shoved at that boulder in Perkin's Park. My cow, to read Andrus's report you'd have thought it was a major avalanche!

And now the darn fool has done it again — with pictures, yet. If I'd known Tom was going to take a picture of me and Lieutenant Bolin, I'd have strangled him. As it was, I heaved a pitcher at the camera and — Do you have any idea how much a flash attachment costs? Haven't got the bill yet.

Well, anyway, that piece they had in the *Gazette* about local resident going in for crime detection was just another big hunk of Andrus's kind of reporting. Crime detection, my foot! — it was simply one monstrous piece of Friday the 13th bad luck.

The whole thing began in the morning when I stubbed my toe on the terrace and banged my nose on the crooked oak. Durn thing wouldn't even bleed. Just swelled up like a football — yes, I know, I've been intending to throw those shoes away but they're so nice and sloppy and comfortable, I just can't part with them.

Then Jim and Don wanted some lemonade and I hadn't much time, so I made it out of a can of concentrate. Couldn't see around that crazy blob of a nose very well and cut my finger on the lid. I wanted blood and that time I got it. A casual glance in that kitchen would have convinced the most innocent that there had been murder most foul.

I couldn't feel any worse, so I decided to go down and get rid of all my money buying the week's groceries. Jim was in the workshop pulling nails out of that pile of two-by-eight beams. The pinch bar slipped and one of the nails sank a half inch into the back of his hand. He didn't say much, but it must have hurt like sin, so I sat him down with a pan full of hot Epsom salts and took little Don with me to the grocery.

I had the station wagon that day and Dad had my car and that's one of the reasons Dad is having a tizzy. He hates to drive my car anyway and then, when all this happened and I was tangled up with the police, there was the station wagon with the name of the business printed right on the side, and notoriety and business don't go together, or something.

Anyway, Don and I started out and on our way down the boulevard Don was being a fighter pilot out of the side window, making that awful machine-gun noise of his at every passing dog. We made the turn into

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Main Street and I never saw so much traffic — and everybody a tourist but me. Two solid lanes in each direction and every one of them going to a fire. Then what should happen but a nine-year-old kid came shooting out of a side street on a bike. Yes, I stopped. I stopped so hard and so fast that the station wagon bucked just like War Paint did last summer at the rodeo. All the rest of the cars stopped, too, and no one hit anything or anybody but that was only because I was carrying all the Friday 13th luck that day, myself. I was so unnerved that my knees were shaking, my teeth were chattering, and I was taking in great gulps of air almost in spasms. Then Don made me furious by saying, "Gee, you sound just like you did that time they brought the oxygen tank from the hospital and you had to breathe into that balloon." I snapped right back, "A good case of pneumonia is all I need to finish this day off right."

I swung around by Sam's to get the beer and Helen's car was outside and darned if Don didn't let the door go and it put a nice scratch in Helen's finish — not Helen, nothing would scratch her finish — her car door, I mean. Helen was in the store and asked all about you and how you liked chemistry. Sally was with her and she told me Sally was taking nuclear physics and for a minute I thought I was in for a dissertation on fission. They were in a hurry, though, and left. Things had been so rugged that I was thinking a bottle of gin might have been more to the point than a case of beer and, when Sam asked what I wanted, I said without realizing it, "A case of gin."

Sam has known me for a jillion years and he knows perfectly well I've never gotten anything but a case of beer but, do you know, he never batted an eye! He just went in the storeroom and came out with a case of gin. It wasn't until I saw it that I realized what I had said. I must have looked like a supreme idiot because Sam just howled and went back for the beer.

Then, back to the car, and Don and I went around and came into the Blue's Supermarket parking lot from the Roan Street side. I always like to come in from that side because you can angle in next to the wall of the store and the boys don't have to walk so far with those heavy boxes.

Hmm, just thought of it — Blue's — what a name for a market. That's one place you're always blue when you come out of but on this day I was blue before I ever got in.

It was at this point, according to Andrus, that I became a sleuth. What a dope! I wonder what he'd have made of the story if he'd known all that had gone before on that gruesome day. You know perfectly well that sleuthing is definitely not my apple, but it just so happens that when things go wrong, one after another, I get so keyed up that I begin to notice things in detail. You do the same thing. Remember how those silly, dried-up weeds looked to you that

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night you rolled the car out on the highway? It was the same with me. What I'm trying to get over is that ordinarily I never notice what people are wearing, myself or anyone else, I've started away from the house so many times in shorts and only discovered it when I was parking the car at the dentist's office. But on this day I could tell you exactly what Helen wore, how she looked — everything — simply because I was in a nervous state, and believe me that dress she had on — well, let's get back to the parking lot.

I drove in and stopped. Friday afternoon, and of course the place was jammed. Not a space left on my side. There was one toward the front of the lot on the other side but that would have meant I'd have to drive 'way up ahead of it and angle my car in backwards, and you know how I am at backing up. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. All of a sudden, just ahead of me, on my side, a lady got into her car and started the motor, so I said, hallelujah I'm in luck. She had plenty of room, so I just sat where I was.

At that precise moment a great big black car pulled into the parking lot, facing me. The driver had passed up the space on his side of the lot, when all he'd have had to do was pull straight into it, and he came right on toward me. He had spotted the lady backing out on my side and wanted *that* space. He wanted to back into it, mind you, so he'd be heading out when he got ready to go. He pulled up until he blocked her path and his bumper was touching mine. But I wouldn't budge. And he wouldn't back up. And the lady couldn't get out. So we all sat and glared at each other. There were five men in that big black car — I could see them now, two in front, three in back. They weren't coming to buy food for any fishing trip, either, because they were all wearing dark suits and hats.

"Well, by that time, I couldn't back out because Jake — you know, the checker at Blue's with the tattoos on his arms? — Jake was coming into the lot right behind me. When I turned around to look, Jake winked. He knew I wanted that spot and he wasn't going to let anybody push me out.

Finally, somebody had to give because the lady was honking like mad; so Jake and I backed up and let the men have the space. By that time, the space at the front was taken, so I had to drive around the end and park in the laundry lot next door. Just as I passed the black car, I yelled at them and called them big so-and-sos and told them I'd better not catch any of them in that grocery or I'd run one of those carts right over him. They never even glanced at me.

Parked at last, I was getting ready to leave the car when Don said, "Look, Mom, look through here at that black car. Four of those men got out and went in the store and the driver is sitting there with his motor running." I asked him how he knew

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the motor was running — we certainly couldn't hear it. He said the car was shaking a little, just as if it was a person who couldn't sit still.

Right then and there, the whole thing began to add up. And it looked mighty strange to me. I grabbed a pile of those little *Weekly Events* magazines which Dad had left in the station wagon and gave some to Don and told him we were going to walk in the back way as if we were delivering printing and try to find Jake and the manager.

We walked around the back but I don't think we needed the magazines because the driver of the black car wasn't looking our way.

We found Jake and the manager and I described the funny bunch in the car, with the motor running and all, and Mr. McCune's eyes nearly fell out. He was going to rush right out front but I pulled his sleeve, holding on for dear life, and said, "No, look through the little windows first and see what's going on up front, because if you should need a telephone, it's back here."

So he looked through one little window and I took the other and, sure enough, two of those men were pushing carts in the direction of the checkers' booths and the other two were leaning against the sides of the front door.

For once, Mr. McCune moved the way I sometimes wish he would when I'm waiting for him to get something out of stock for me. He had the police notified in nothing flat — even before the men had gotten their carts halfway to the checking-out stands.

I looked over at him and he had pulled a revolver out from somewhere and was standing there looking at it like he'd never seen one before. That decided me. I said, "Here, give me that." And I took it away from him. I shoved Don at Jake and said, "Keep him back here." Then I went through the swinging door and grabbed a cart full of groceries right out of a woman's hands and went boiling up the aisle with it right behind one of the men.

The woman started yelling bloody murder about me swiping her cart. The man turned around to look. I shoved the woman's cart right into him and jammed him and his cart up against the pickle shelves. Jars of pickles and olives started crashing down like mad. The man started to reach into his coat and I hauled up Mr. McCune's revolver. But did you ever pick up one of those revolvers? The things are heavier than you think and this one weighed a ton. It kept wobbling all around, so I had to hold it with both hands.

The man yelled something at me — in Italian, I think it was. Now, I don't understand Italian but this sounded even worse than what I had called his partner outside, in German. I was so nervous that before I knew it I had squeezed the trigger — only the darned safety was on. He saw me squeeze and went for his gun again. Fortunately, I remembered where the safety was on account of my father's

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old Colt that he used to shoot off every New Year's Eve.

Just as I got it off, one of the men at the door let loose with a shot and that got me all confused, so I started shooting too. But I just couldn't seem to hit anything except bottles!

The men up front weren't doing so badly, either. There were one heck of a lot of potato chips flying around. Then Mr. McCune's gun quit on me, so I guessed it was empty. Anyway, my man wasn't standing any more.

He was sitting on the floor between the two baskets with a faraway look and a lot of blood on his face.

All of a sudden, I didn't feel too good and I couldn't seem to get my left hand away from Mr. McCune's gun.

I was out of it then, but that's when things really started. There were sirens and police and more shots and one of the men apparently was caught with his arms in the cash register.

They never did make their getaway. The man outside tried, when he heard the shots, but the police had sent two cars, one down Main Street and one up Roan, so they got him before he could even get out of the parking lot. I never knew we had so many police. They kept coming in droves. A lieutenant was standing over me asking a hundred questions, but all I could do was point at the man I thought I had shot and he said, "Hell, lady, that's mostly ketchup. One of your shots exploded a bottle and the glass laid his face open."

So he asked for my gun and I still couldn't let go of it, so he had to pry me away from it. The next thing I knew, two cops were trying to shove me in an ambulance along with that gangster and I wouldn't ride with him. There was a big fuss and they decided I was hurt worse than the gangster, so they gave me the ambulance.

"What do you mean, hurt?" I said, and they pointed at my arm and it was all sort of torn up and something pointed was sticking out. So I got in. We started down the street and suddenly I remembered Don and had to yell myself blue in the face before they'd go back and get him.

The upshoot (as Grandpa used to say) was that Don got his heart's desire by riding in an ambulance and I was having an operation when I should have been cooking supper — and five gangsters went to jail. Blue's wasn't robbed but they sure lost a lot of bottled goods. And to top it all I was presented with a prime rib roast that had a bullet hole in it. That's the thing you see in the picture of me — the thing you couldn't figure out.

Now, for gosh sakes, stop reading the *Gazette*. They had the whole thing wrong. I was *not* being a detective — I just lost my head for a minute, that's all.

Your father is fit to be tied. All he said, when he came to the hospital, was, "Hello," in a sort of biding-his-time tone of voice. I'm afraid to go home, and this cast weighs a ton and itches like blazes.

Love,
Mom

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A famous American short story and a classic "riddle"

MARJORIE DAW

by THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

DR. DILLON TO EDWARD DELANEY, ESQ., AT THE PINES, NEAR RYE, N.H.

August 8.

My Dear Sir:

I am happy to assure you that your anxiety is without reason. Flemming will be confined to the sofa for three or four weeks, and will have to be careful at first how he uses his leg. A fracture of this kind is always a tedious affair. Fortunately, the bone was very skillfully set by the surgeon who chanced to be in the drugstore where Flemming was brought after his fall, and I apprehend no permanent inconvenience from the accident. *Flemming is doing perfectly well physically;* but I must confess that the irritable and morbid state of mind into which he has fallen causes me a great deal of uneasiness. He is the last man in the world who ought to break his leg. You know how impetuous our friend is ordinarily, what a soul of restlessness and energy, never content unless he is rushing at some object, like a sportive bull at a red shawl; but amiable withal. He is no longer amiable. His temper has become something frightful. Miss Fanny Flemming came up from Newport, where the family are staying for the summer, to nurse him; but he packed her off the next morning in tears. He has a complete set of Balzac's works, 27 volumes, piled up near his sofa to throw at Watkins whenever that exemplary serving-man appears with his meals. Yesterday I very innocently brought Flemming a small basket of lemons. You know it was a strip of lemon-peel on the curbstone that caused our friend's mischance. Well, he no sooner set his eyes upon those lemons than he fell into such a rage as I cannot adequately describe. This is only one of his moods, and the least distressing. At other times he sits with bowed head regarding his splintered limb, silent, sullen, despairing. When this fit is on him — and it sometimes lasts all day — nothing can distract his melancholy. He refuses to eat, does not even read the newspapers; books, except as projectiles for Watkins, have no charms for him. His state is truly pitiable.

Now, if he were a poor man, with a family depending on his daily labor, this irritability and despondency would be natural enough. But in a young fellow of twenty-four, with plenty of money and seemingly not a care in the world, the thing is monstrous. If he continues to give way to

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his vagaries in this manner, he will end by bringing on an inflammation of the fibula. It was the fibula he broke. I am at my wits' end to know what to prescribe for him. I have anesthetics and lotions, to make people sleep and to soothe pain; but I've no medicine that will make a man have a little common-sense. That is beyond my skill, but maybe it is not beyond yours. You are Flemming's intimate friend, his *fidus Achates*. Write to him, write to him frequently, distract his mind, cheer him up, and prevent him from becoming a confirmed case of melancholia. Perhaps he has some important plans disarranged by his present confinement. If he has you will know, and will know how to advise him judiciously. I trust your father finds the change beneficial? I am, my dear sir, with great respect, etc.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING, WEST 38TH STREET, N. Y.

August 9.

My Dear Jack:

I had a line from Dillon this morning, and was rejoiced to learn that your hurt is not so bad as reported. Like a certain personage, you are not so black and blue as you are painted. Dillon will put you on your pins again in two or three weeks, if you will only have patience and follow his counsels. Did you get my note of last Wednesday? I was greatly troubled when I heard of the accident.

I can imagine how tranquil and saintly you are with your leg in a trough! It is deuced awkward, to be sure, just as we had promised ourselves a glorious month together at the seaside; but we must make the best of it. It is unfortunate, too, that my father's health renders it impossible for me to leave him. I think he has much improved; the sea air is his native element; but he still needs my arm to lean upon in his walks, and requires someone more careful than a servant to look after him. I cannot come to you, dear Jack, but I have hours of unemployed time on hand, and I will write you a whole post-office full of letters, if that will divert you. Heaven knows, I haven't anything to write about. It isn't as if we were living at one of the beach houses; then I could do you some character studies, and fill your imagination with groups of sea goddesses, with their (or somebody else's) raven and blonde manes hanging down their shoulders. You should have Aphrodite in morning wrapper, in evening costume, and in her prettiest bathing suit. But we are far from all that here. We have rooms in a farmhouse, on a crossroad, two miles from the hotels, and lead the quietest of lives.

I wish I were a novelist. This old house, with its sanded floors and high wainscots, and its narrow windows looking out upon a cluster of pines that turn themselves into aeolian harps every time the wind blows, would be the place in which to write a summer romance. It should be a story with the odors of the forest and

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the breath of the sea in it. It should be a novel like one of that Russian fellow's — what's his name?

Yet I wonder if even a Liza or an Alexandra Paulovna could stir the heart of a man who has constant twinges in his leg. I wonder if one of our own Yankee girls of the best type, haughty and *spirituelle*, would be of any comfort to you in your present deplorable condition. If I thought so, I would hasten down to the Surf House and catch one for you; or, better still, I would find you one over the way.

Picture to yourself a large white house just across the road, nearly opposite our cottage. It is not a house, but a mansion, built, perhaps, in the colonial period, with rambling extensions, and gambrel roof, and a wide piazza on three sides — a self-possessed, high-bred piece of architecture, with its nose in the air. It stands back from the road and has an obsequious retinue of fringed elms and oaks and weeping willows. Sometimes in the morning, and oftener in the afternoon, when the sun has withdrawn from that part of the mansion, a young woman appears on the piazza with some mysterious Penelope web of embroidery in her hand, or a book. There is a hammock over there — of pineapple fibre, it looks from here. A hammock is very becoming when one is eighteen, and has golden hair and dark eyes and an emerald-colored illusion dress looped up after the fashion of a Dresden china shepherdess, and is *chaussée* like a belle of the time of Louis Quatorze. All this splendor goes into that hammock, and sways there like a pond-lily in the golden afternoon. The window of my bedroom looks down on that piazza — and so do I.

But enough of this nonsense, which ill becomes a sedate young attorney taking his vacation with an invalid father. Drop me a line, dear Jack, and tell me how you really are. State your case. Write me a long, quiet letter. If you are violent or abusive, I'll take the law to you.

JOHN FLEMMING TO EDWARD DELANEY

August 11.

Your letter, dear Ned, was a godsend. Fancy what a fix I am in — I, who never had a day's sickness since I was born. My left leg weighs three tons. It is embalmed in spices and smothered in layers of fine linen, like a mummy. I can't move. I haven't moved for 5,000 years. I'm of the time of Pharaoh.

I lie from morning till night on a lounge, staring into the hot street. Everybody is out of town enjoying himself. The brownstone-front houses across the street resemble a row of particularly ugly coffins set up on end. A green mould is settling on the names of the deceased, carved on the silver doorplates. Sardonic spiders have sewed up the keyholes. All is silence and dust and desolation. — I interrupt this a moment, to take a shy at Watkins with the second volume of César Birotteau. Missed him!

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I think I could bring him down with a copy of Sainte-Beuve or the Dictionnaire Universel, if I had it. These small Balzac books somehow do not quite fit my hand; but I shall fetch him yet. I've an idea that Watkins is tapping the old gentleman's Château Yquem. Duplicate key of the wine-cellar. Hibernian swarries in the front basement. Young Cheops upstairs, snug in his cerements. Watkins glides into my chamber, with that colorless, hypocritical face of his drawn out long like an accordion; but I know he grins, all the way downstairs, and is glad I have broken my leg. Was not my evil star in the very zenith when I ran up to town to attend that dinner at Delmonico's? I didn't come up altogether for that. It was partly to buy Frank Livingstone's roan mare Margot. And now I shall not be able to sit in the saddle these two months. I'll send the mare down to you at The Pines — is that the name of the place?

Old Dillon fancies that I have something on my mind. He drives me wild with lemons. Lemons for a mind diseased! Nonsense. I am only as restless as the devil under this confinement — a thing I'm not used to.

Your letter is the first consoling thing I have had since my disaster, ten days ago. It really cheered me up for half an hour. Send me a screed, Ned, as often as you can, if you love me. Anything will do. Write me more about that little girl in the hammock. That was very pretty, all that about the Dresden china shepherdess and the pond-lily; the imagery a little mixed, perhaps, but very pretty. I didn't suppose you had so much sentimental furniture in your upper story. It shows how one may be familiar for years with the reception-room of his neighbor, and never suspect what is directly under his mansard. I supposed your loft stuffed with dry legal parchments, mortgages, and affidavits; you take down a package of manuscript, and lo! there are lyrics and sonnets and canzonettas. You really have a graphic descriptive touch, Edward Delaney, and I suspect you of anonymous love-tales in the magazines.

I shall be a bear until I hear from you again. Tell me all about your pretty *inconnue* across the road. What is her name? Who is she? Who's her father? Where's her mother? Who's her lover? You cannot imagine how this will occupy me. The more trifling, the better. My imprisonment has weakened me intellectually to such a degree that I find your epistolary gifts quite considerable. I am passing into my second childhood. In a week or two I shall take to India-rubber rings and prongs of coral. A silver cup, with an appropriate inscription, would be a delicate attention on your part. In the meantime, write!

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 12.

The sick pasha shall be amused. *Bismillah!* he wills it so. If the story-teller becomes prolix and tedious —

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the bow-string and the sack, and two Nubians to drop him into the Piscataqua! But truly, Jack, I have a hard task. There is literally nothing here — except the little girl over the way. She is swinging in the hammock at this moment. It is to me compensation for many of the ills of life to see her now and then put out a small kid boot, which fits like a glove, and set herself going. Who is she, and what is her name? Her name is Daw. Only daughter of Mr. Richard W. Daw, ex-colonel and banker. Mother dead. One brother at Harvard, elder brother killed at the battle of Fair Oaks, ten years ago. Old, rich family, the Daws. This is the homestead, where father and daughter pass eight months of the twelve; the rest of the year in Baltimore and Washington. The New England winter is too much for the old gentleman. The daughter is called Marjorie — Marjorie Daw. Sounds odd at first, doesn't it? But after you say it over to yourself half a dozen times, you like it. There's a pleasing quaintness to it, something prim and violet-like. Must be a nice sort of girl to be called Marjorie Daw.

I had mine host of The Pines in the witness-box last night and drew the foregoing testimony from him. He has charge of Mr. Daw's vegetable garden, and has known the family these 30 years. Of course I shall make the acquaintance of my neighbors before many days. It will be next to impossible for me not to meet Mr. Daw or Miss Daw in some of my walks. The young lady has a favorite path to the sea-beach. I shall intercept her some morning, and touch my hat to her. Then the princess will bend her fair head to me with courteous surprise not unmixed with haughtiness. Will snub me, in fact. All this for thy sake, O Pasha of the Snapt Axle-tree! . . . How oddly things fall out! Ten minutes ago I was called down to the parlor — you know the kind of parlors in farmhouses on the coast, a sort of amphibious parlor, with seashells on the mantelpiece and spruce branches in the chimney-place — where I found my father and Mr. Daw doing the antique polite to each other. He had come to pay his respects to his new neighbors. Mr. Daw is a tall, slim gentleman of about 55, with a florid face and snow-white mustache and side-whiskers. Looks like Mr. Dombey, or as Mr. Dombey would have looked if he had served a few years in the British Army. Mr. Daw was a colonel in the late war, commanding the regiment in which his son was a lieutenant. Plucky old boy, backbone of New Hampshire granite. Before taking his leave, the colonel delivered himself of an invitation as if he were issuing a general order. Miss Daw has a few friends coming, at 4 P.M., to play croquet on the lawn (parade-ground) and have tea (cold rations) on the piazza. Will we honor them with our company? (or be sent to the guardhouse). My father declines on the plea of ill-health. My father's son bows with as much suavity as he knows, and accepts.

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In my next I shall have something to tell you. I shall have seen the little beauty face to face. I have a presentiment, Jack, that this Daw is a *rara avis!* Keep up your spirits, my boy, until I write you another letter — and send me along word how's your leg.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 13.

The party, my dear Jack, was as dreary as possible. A lieutenant of the navy, the rector of the Episcopal Church at Stillwater, and a society swell from Nahant. The lieutenant looked as if he had swallowed a couple of his buttons, and found the bullion rather indigestible; the rector was a pensive youth, of the daffydowndilly sort; and the swell from Nahant was a very weak tidal wave indeed. The women were much better, as they always are; the two Miss Kingsburys of Philadelphia, staying at the Seashell House, two bright and engaging girls. But Marjorie Daw!

The company broke up soon after tea, and I remained to smoke a cigar with the colonel on the piazza. It was like seeing a picture, to see Miss Marjorie hovering around the old soldier, and doing a hundred gracious little things for him. She brought the cigars and lighted the tapers with her own delicate fingers, in the most enchanting fashion. As we sat there, she came and went in the summer twilight, and seemed, with her white dress and pale gold hair, like some lovely phantom that had sprung into existence out of the smoke wreaths. If she had melted into air, like the statue of Galatea in the play, I should have been more sorry than surprised.

It was easy to perceive that the old colonel worshipped her, and she him. I think the relation between an elderly father and a daughter just blooming into womanhood the most beautiful possible. There is in it a subtile sentiment that cannot exist in the case of mother and daughter, or that of son and mother. But this is getting into deep water.

I sat with the Daws until half-past 10, and saw the moon rise on the sea. The ocean, that had stretched motionless and black against the horizon, was changed by magic into a broken field of glittering ice, interspersed with marvelous silvery fjords. In the far distance the Isles of Shoals loomed up like a group of huge bergs drifting down on us. The Polar Regions in a June thaw! It was exceedingly fine. What did we talk about? We talked about the weather — and *you!* The weather has been disagreeable for several days past — and so have you. I glided from one topic to the other very naturally. I told my friends of your accident; how it had frustrated all our summer plans, and what our plans were. I played quite a spirited solo on the fibula. Then I described you; or, rather, I didn't. I spoke of your amiability, of your patience under this severe affliction; of your touching gratitude when Dillon brings you little presents of fruit; of your

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tenderness to your sister Fanny, whom you would not allow to stay in town to nurse you, and how you heroically sent her back to Newport, preferring to remain alone with Mary, the cook, and your man Watkins, to whom, by the way, you were devotedly attached. If you had been there, Jack, you wouldn't have known yourself. I should have excelled as a criminal lawyer, if I had not turned my attention to a different branch of jurisprudence.

Miss Marjorie asked all manner of leading questions concerning you. It did not occur to me then, but it struck me forcibly afterwards, that she evinced a singular interest in the conversation. When I got back to my room, I recalled how eagerly she leaned forward, with her full, snowy throat in strong moonlight, listening to what I said. Positively, I think I made her like you!

Miss Daw is a girl whom you would like immensely, I can tell you that. A beauty without affectation, a high and tender nature — if one can read the soul in the face.

And the old colonel is a noble character, too, and quite impressive.

I am glad that the Daws are such pleasant people. The Pines is an isolated spot, and my resources are few. I fear I should have found life here somewhat monotonous before long, with no other society than that of my excellent sire. It is true, I might have made a target of the defenseless invalid; but I haven't a taste for artillery, *moi*.

JOHN FLEMMING TO EDWARD DELANEY

August 17.

For a man who hasn't a taste for artillery, it occurs to me, my friend, you are keeping up a pretty lively fire on my inner works. But go on. Cynicism is a small brass field-piece that eventually bursts and kills the artilleryman.

You may abuse me as much as you like, and I'll not complain; for I don't know what I should do without your letters. They are curing me. I haven't hurled anything at Watkins since last Sunday, partly because I have grown more amiable under your teaching, and partly because Watkins captured my ammunition one night, and carried it off to the library. He is rapidly losing the habit he had acquired of dodging whenever I rub my ear, or make any slight motion with my right arm. He is still suggestive of the wine-cellar, however. You may break, you may shatter Watkins, if you will, but the scent of the Woederer will hang round him still.

Ned, that Miss Daw must be a charming person. I should certainly like her. I like her already. When you spoke in your first letter of seeing a young girl swinging in a hammock under your chamber window, I was somehow strangely drawn to her. I cannot account for it in the least. What you have subsequently written of Miss Daw has strengthened the impression. You seem to be describing a woman I have known in some previous state of existence, or dreamed

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of in this. Upon my word, if you were to send me her photograph, I believe I should recognize her at a glance. Her manner, that listening attitude, her traits of character, as you indicate them, the light hair and the dark eyes — they are all familiar things to me. Asked a lot of questions, did she? Curious about me? That is strange.

You would laugh in your sleeve, you wretched old cynic, if you knew how I lie awake nights, with my gas turned down to a star, thinking of The Pines and the house across the road. How cool it must be down there! I long for the salt smell in the air. I picture the colonel smoking his cheroot on the piazza. I send you and Miss Daw off on afternoon rambles along the beach. Sometimes I let you stroll with her under the elms in the moonlight, for you are great friends by this time, I take it, and see each other every day. I know your ways and your manners! Then I fall into a truculent mood and would like to destroy somebody. Have you noticed anything in the shape of a lover hanging around the colonial Lares and Penates? Does that lieutenant of the horse-marines or that young Stillwater parson visit the house much? Not that I am pining for news of them, but any gossip of the kind would be in order. I wonder, Ned, you don't fall in love with Miss Daw. I am ripe to do it myself. Speaking of photographs, couldn't you manage to slip one of her *cartes-de-visite* from her album — she must have an album, you know — and send it to me? I will return it before it could be missed. That's a good fellow! Did the mare arrive safe and sound? It will be a capital animal this autumn for Central Park.

Oh — my leg? I forgot about my leg. It's better.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 20.

You are correct in your surmises. I am on the most friendly terms with our neighbors. The colonel and my father smoke their afternoon cigar together in our sitting-room or on the piazza opposite, and I pass an hour or two of the day or the evening with the daughter. I am more and more struck by the beauty, modesty, and intelligence of Miss Daw.

You ask me why I do not fall in love with her. I will be frank, Jack: I have thought of that. She is young, rich, accomplished, uniting in herself more attractions, mental and personal, than I can recall in any girl of my acquaintance; but she lacks the something that would be necessary to inspire in me that kind of interest. Possessing this unknown quantity, a woman neither beautiful nor wealthy nor very young could bring me to her feet. But not Miss Daw. If we were shipwrecked together on an uninhabited island — let me suggest a tropical island, for it costs no more to be picturesque — I would build her a bamboo hut, I would fetch her bread-fruit and cocoanuts, I would fry yams for her, I would lure the

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ingenuous turtle and make her nourishing soups, but I wouldn't make love to her — not under eighteen months. I would like to have her for a sister, that I might shield her and counsel her, and spend half my income on old thread-lace and camel's-hair shawls. (We are off the island now.) If such were not my feeling, there would still be an obstacle to my loving Miss Daw. A greater misfortune could scarcely befall me than to love her. Flemming, I am about to make a revelation that will astonish you. I may be all wrong in my premises and consequently in my conclusions; but you shall judge.

That night when I returned to my room after the croquet party at the Daws', and was thinking over the trivial events of the evening, I was suddenly impressed by the air of eager attention with which Miss Daw had followed my account of your accident. I think I mentioned this to you. Well, the next morning, as I went to mail my letter, I overtook Miss Daw on the road to Rye, where the post office is, and accompanied her there and back, an hour's walk. The conversation again turned on you, and again I remarked that inexplicable look of interest which had lighted up her face the previous evening. Since then, I have seen Miss Daw perhaps ten times, perhaps oftener, and on each occasion I found that when I was not speaking of you, or your sister, or some person or place associated with you, I was not holding her attention. She would be absent-minded, her eyes would wander away from me to the sea, or to some distant object in the landscape; her fingers would play with the leaves of a book in a way that convinced me she was not listening. At these moments if I abruptly changed the theme — I did it several times as an experiment — and dropped some remark about my friend Flemming, then the sombre blue eyes would come back to me instantly.

Now, is not this the oddest thing in the world? No, not the oddest. The effect which you tell me was produced on you by my casual mention of an unknown girl swinging in a hammock is certainly as strange. You can conjecture how that passage in your letter of Friday startled me. Is it possible, then, that two people who have never met, and who are hundreds of miles apart, can exert a magnetic influence on each other? I have read of such psychological phenomena, but never credited them. I leave the solution of the problem to you. As for myself, all other things being favorable, it would be impossible for me to fall in love with a woman who listens to me only when I am talking of my friend!

I am not aware that any one is paying marked attention to my fair neighbor. The lieutenant of the navy — he is stationed at Rivermouth — sometimes drops in of an evening, and sometimes the rector from Stillwater; the lieutenant the oftener. He was there last night. I should not be surprised if he had an eye to the heiress;

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but he is not formidable. Mistress Daw carries a neat little spear of irony, and the honest lieutenant seems to have a particular facility for impaling himself on the point of it. He is not dangerous, I should say; though I have known a woman to satirize a man for years, and marry him after all. Decidedly, the lowly rector is not dangerous; yet, again, who has not seen Cloth of Frieze victorious in the lists where Cloth of Gold went down?

As to the photograph. There is an exquisite ivorytype of Marjorie, in *passe-partout*, on the drawing-room mantelpiece. It would be missed at once if taken. I would do anything reasonable for you, Jack; but I've no burning desire to be hauled up before the local justice of the peace on a charge of petty larceny.

P.S. — Enclosed is a spray of mignonette, which I advise you to treat tenderly. Yes, we talked of you again last night, as usual. It is becoming a little dreary for me.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 22.

Your letter in reply to my last has occupied my thoughts all the morning. I do not know what to think. Do you mean to say that you are seriously half in love with a woman whom you have never seen — with a shadow, a chimera? for what else can Miss Daw be to you? I do not understand it at all. I understand neither you nor her. You are a couple of ethereal beings moving in finer air than I can breathe with my commonplace lungs. Such delicacy of sentiment is something that I admire without comprehending. I am bewildered. I am of the earth earthy, and I find myself in the incongruous position of having to do with mere souls, with natures so finely tempered that I run some risk of shattering them in my awkwardness. I am as Caliban among the spirits!

Reflecting on your letter, I am not sure that it is wise in me to continue this correspondence. But no, Jack; I do wrong to doubt the good sense that forms the basis of your character. You are deeply interested in Miss Daw; you feel that she is a person whom you may perhaps greatly admire when you know her: at the same time you bear in mind that the chances are ten to five that, when you do come to know her, she will fall far short of your ideal, and you will not care for her in the least. Look at it in this sensible light, and I will hold back nothing from you.

Yesterday afternoon my father and myself rode over to Rivermouth with the Daws. A heavy rain in the morning had cooled the atmosphere and laid the dust. To Rivermouth is a drive of eight miles, along a winding road lined all the way with wild barberry bushes. I never saw anything more brilliant than these bushes, the green of the foliage and the faint blush of the berries intensified by the rain. The colonel drove, with my father in front, Miss Daw and I on

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the back seat. I resolved that for the first five miles your name should not pass my lips. I was amused by the artful attempts she made, at the start, to break through my reticence. Then a silence fell upon her; and then she became suddenly gay. That keenness which I enjoyed so much when it was exercised on the lieutenant was not so satisfactory directed against myself. Miss Daw has great sweetness of disposition, but she can be disagreeable. She is like the young lady in the rhyme, with the curl on her forehead:

When she is good,
She is very, very good,

And when she is bad, she is horrid! I kept to my resolution, however; but on the return home I relented, and talked of your mare! Miss Daw is going to try a sidesaddle on Margot some morning. The animal is a trifle too light for my weight. By the bye, I nearly forgot to say that Miss Daw had her picture taken yesterday at Rivermouth. If the negative turns out well, I am to have a copy. So our ends will be accomplished without crime. I wish, though, I could send you the ivorytype in the drawing-room; it is cleverly colored, and would give you an idea of her hair and eyes, which of course the other will not.

No, Jack, the spray of mignonette did not come from me. A man of 28 doesn't enclose flowers in his letters — to another man. But don't attach too much significance to the circumstance. She gives sprays of mignonette to the rector, sprays to the lieutenant. She has even given a rose from her bosom to your slave. It is her jocund nature to scatter flowers, like Spring.

If my letters sometimes read disjointedly, you must understand that I never finish one at a sitting, but write at intervals, when the mood is on me.

The mood is not on me now.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 23.

I have just returned from the strangest interview with Marjorie. She has all but confessed to me her interest in you. But with what modesty and dignity! Her words elude my pen as I attempt to put them on paper; and, indeed, it was not so much what she said as her manner; and that I cannot reproduce. Perhaps it was of a piece with the strangeness of this whole business, that she should tacitly acknowledge to a third party the love she feels for a man she has never beheld! But I have lost, through your aid, the faculty of being surprised. I accept things as people do in dreams. Now that I am again in my room, it all appears like an illusion — the black masses of Rembrandtish shadow under the trees, the fireflies whirling in Pyrrhic dances among the shrubbery, the sea over there, Marjorie sitting on the hammock!

It is past midnight, and I am too sleepy to write more.

Next Morning.

My father has suddenly taken it into his head to spend a few days at

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the Shoals. In the meanwhile you will not hear from me. I see Marjorie walking in the garden with the colonel. I wish I could speak to her alone, but shall probably not have an opportunity before we leave.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 28.

You were passing into your second childhood, were you? Your intellect was so reduced that my epistolary gifts seemed quite considerable to you, did they? I rise superior to the sarcasm in your favor of the 11th instant, when I notice that five days' silence on my part is sufficient to throw you into the depths of despondency.

We returned only this morning from Appledore, that enchanted island. I find on my desk three letters from you! Evidently there is no lingering doubt in *your* mind as to the pleasure I derive from your correspondence. These letters are undated, but in what I take to be the latest are two passages that require my consideration. You will pardon my candor, dear Flemming, but the conviction forces itself upon me that as your leg grows stronger your head becomes weaker. You ask my advice on a certain point. I will give it. In my opinion you could do nothing more unwise than to address a note to Miss Daw, thanking her for the flower. It would, I am sure, offend her delicacy beyond pardon. She knows you only through me; you are to her an abstraction, a figure in a dream — a dream from which the faintest shock would awaken her. Of course, if you enclose a note to me and insist on its delivery, I shall deliver it; but I advise you not to do so.

You say you are able, with the aid of a cane, to walk about your chamber, and that you purpose to come to The Pines the instant Dillon thinks you strong enough to stand the journey. Again I advise you not to. Do you not see that, every hour you remain away, Marjorie's glamor deepens, and your influence over her increases? You will ruin everything by precipitancy. Wait until you are entirely recovered; in any case, do not come without giving me warning. I fear the effect of your abrupt advent here — under the circumstances.

Miss Daw was evidently glad to see us back again, and gave me both hands in the frankest way. She stopped at the door a moment this afternoon in the carriage; she had been over to Rivermouth for her pictures.

Unluckily the photographer had spilled some acid on the plate, and she was obliged to give him another sitting. I have an intuition that something is troubling Marjorie. She had an abstracted air not usual with her.

However, it may be only my fancy. . . . I end this, leaving several things unsaid, to accompany my father on one of those long walks which are now his chief medicine — and mine!

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EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 29.

I write in great haste to tell you what has taken place here since my letter of last night. I am in the utmost perplexity. Only one thing is plain — *you* must not dream of coming to The Pines. Marjorie has told her father everything! I saw her for a few minutes, an hour ago, in the garden; and as near as I could gather from her confused statement, the facts are these: Lieutenant Bradley — that's the naval officer stationed at Rivermouth — has been paying court to Miss Daw for some time past, but not so much to her liking as to that of the colonel, who it seems is an old friend of the young gentleman's father. Yesterday (I knew she was in some trouble when she drove up to our gate) the colonel spoke to Marjorie of Bradley — urged his suit, I infer. Marjorie expressed her dislike for the lieutenant with characteristic frankness, and finally confessed to her father — well, I really do not know what she confessed. It must have been the vaguest of confessions, and must have sufficiently puzzled the colonel. At any rate, it exasperated him. I suppose I am implicated in the matter and that the colonel feels bitterly towards me. I do not see why: I have carried no messages between you and Miss Daw; I have behaved with the greatest discretion. I can find no flaw anywhere in my proceeding. I do not see that anybody has done anything — except the colonel himself.

It is probable, nevertheless, that the friendly relations between the two houses will be broken off. "A plague on both your houses," say you. I will keep you informed, as well as I can, of what occurs over the way. We shall remain here until the second week in September. Stay where you are, or, at all events, do not dream of joining me. . . . Colonel Daw is sitting on the piazza looking rather wicked. I have not seen Marjorie since I parted with her in the garden.

EDWARD DELANEY TO THOMAS DILLON, M.D., MADISON SQUARE, N. Y.

August 30.

My Dear Doctor:

If you have any influence over Flemming, I beg of you to exert it to prevent his coming to this place at present. There are circumstances, which I will explain to you before long, that make it of the first importance that he should not come into this neighborhood. His appearance here, I speak advisedly, would be disastrous to him. In urging him to remain in New York, or to go to some inland resort, you will be doing him and me a real service. Of course you will not mention my name in this connection. You know me well enough, my dear doctor, to be assured that, in begging your secret cooperation, I have reasons that will meet your entire approval when they are made plain to you. We shall return to town on the 15th of next

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month, and my first duty will be to present myself at your hospitable door and satisfy your curiosity, if I have excited it. My father, I am glad to state, has so greatly improved that he can no longer be regarded as an invalid. With great esteem, I am, etc., etc.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

August 31.

Your letter, announcing your mad determination to come here, has just reached me. I beseech you to reflect a moment. The step would be fatal to your interests and hers. You would furnish just cause for irritation to R. W. D.; and though he loves Marjorie devotedly, he is capable of going to any lengths if opposed. You would not like, I am convinced, to be the means of causing him to treat *her* with severity. That would be the result of your presence at The Pines at this juncture. I am annoyed to be obliged to point out these things to you. We are on very delicate ground, Jack; the situation is critical and the slightest mistake in a move would cost us the game. If you consider it worth the winning, be patient. Trust a little to my sagacity. Wait and see what happens. Moreover, I understand from Dillon that you are in no condition to take so long a journey. He thinks the air of the coast would be the worst thing possible for you; that you ought to go inland, if anywhere. Be advised by me. Be advised by Dillon.

TELEGRAMS

September 1.

1. — TO EDWARD DELANEY.

Letter received. Dillon be hanged. I think I ought to be on the ground.
J. F.

2. — TO JOHN FLEMMING.

Stay where you are. You would only complicate matters. Do not move until you hear from me.
E. D.

3. — TO EDWARD DELANEY.

My being at The Pines could be kept secret. I must see her. J. F.

4. — TO JOHN FLEMMING.

Do not think of it. It would be useless. R. W. D. has locked M. in her room. You would not be able to effect an interview. E. D.

5. — TO EDWARD DELANEY.

Locked her in her room. Good God. That settles the question. I shall leave by the 12:15 express. J. F.

THE ARRIVAL

On the second day of September, as the down-express, due at 3:40, left the station at Hampton, a young man, leaning on the shoulder of a servant, whom he addressed as Watkins, stepped from the platform into a hack, and requested to be driven to The Pines.

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On arriving at the front gate of a modest farmhouse, a few miles from the station, the young man descended with difficulty from the carriage and casting a hasty glance across the road, seemed much impressed by some peculiarity in the landscape.

Again leaning hard on the shoulder of the person Watkins, he walked to the door of the farmhouse and inquired for Mr. Edward Delaney. He was informed by the aged man who answered his knock that Mr. Edward Delaney had gone to Boston the day before, but that Mr. Jonas Delaney was within.

This bit of information did not appear satisfactory to the stranger, who inquired if Mr. Edward Delaney had left any message for Mr. John Flemming.

There *was* a letter for Mr. John Flemming, if he were that person. After a brief absence the aged man reappeared with a letter.

EDWARD DELANEY TO JOHN FLEMMING

September 1.

I am horror-stricken at what I have done! When I began this correspondence I had no other purpose than to relieve the tedium of your sick-chamber. Dillon told me to cheer you up. I tried to. I thought that you entered into the spirit of the thing. I had no idea, until within a few days, that you were taking matters *au grand sérieux*.

What can I say? I tried to make a little romance to interest you, something soothing and idyllic, and, by Jove! I have done it only too well! My father doesn't know a word of this, so don't jar the old gentleman any more than you can help. I fly from the wrath to come — when you arrive! For, dear Jack, there isn't any colonial mansion on the other side of the road, there isn't any piazza, there isn't any hammock — there isn't any Marjorie Daw!

In her famous book, THE TECHNIQUE OF THE MYSTERY STORY, *Carolyn Wells had some interesting comments to make on "The Nature of the Riddle Story and its Types." She said: "The distinguishing feature of the Riddle Story is that the reader should be confronted with a number of mysterious facts of which the explanation is reserved till the end. Now this reservation of the final solution, in order to pique the reader's curiosity, excite his ingenuity, and lead him on to an unexpected climax, is a quite legitimate artistic effect. The only question to be asked about it in any particular instance is whether it succeeds, whether the effect is really accomplished? And for its success two primary qualifications are necessary — first, that*

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the mystery should really be mysterious; second, that the explanation should really explain.

"The Riddle Story, then, is based entirely on a puzzle whose solution is a clever trick of the author and usually not to be guessed by the reader. Unlike the Detective Story, there are no clues, either true or misleading. The reader goes swiftly from his first surprise to sustained wonder, and then to an intense and abiding curiosity that lasts until the solution is flashed upon him. The plot is meant to catch the reader napping, and seldom indeed is he wide awake enough to solve the riddle."

And then Carolyn Wells listed some of the outstanding Riddle Stories, and one was Thomas Bailey Aldrich's "Marjorie Daw."

Now that you have read "Marjorie Daw," do you agree with Carolyn Wells that it is *a Riddle Story?*

Does it have the "two primary qualifications" that Carolyn Wells considered necessary? Is there really a mystery in the beginning and in the middle of the story? Is the "mystery," such as it may be, "really mysterious"? And while we grant there is an explanation that "really explains," how can there be an explanation of a mystery that does not seem to exist?

Actually, the reader of "Marjorie Daw" is not confronted in the beginning "with a number of mysterious facts." With a kind of romantic suspense, yes; but there is no reason to believe there is a mystery. True, "the explanation is reserved to the end," but it is not an explanation of a mystery; it is really a surprise ending — almost in the O. Henry sense.

If, as Carolyn Wells maintained, "the Riddle Story is based entirely on a puzzle whose solution is a clever trick of the author and usually not to be guessed by the reader," then "Marjorie Daw" qualifies on the last two counts — the solution is *a clever trick of the author and probably was* not *guessed by most readers; but we don't see how Carolyn Wells could have felt that the story was "based entirely on a puzzle." We will agree with Carolyn Wells, wholeheartedly, that the plot of "Marjorie Daw" was "meant to catch the reader napping" — so in that sense the author* did *write a riddle story.*

Or did he?

Frankly, we're confused. We don't honestly know whether "Marjorie Daw" is a riddle story or not. In the last analysis it doesn't really matter: the story is beautifully told, it has charm and style, and its denouement was — at least, to us — a flashing surprise. Why insist on labels?

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IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

If you are a Cornell Woolrich fan (and, seriously, who isn't?), you will be interested in some surprising statistics and in the announcement we are about to make. Since Volume 1, Number 1 of EQMM, which was published fourteen years ago, we have brought you no less than 42 short stories and novelettes by Cornell Woolrich and/or William Irish. This represents an average of three Woolrich stories per year since the autumn of 1941.

For a time it looked as if the Woolrich tale in this issue might be the last Woolrich story to appear in EQMM. Sad words indeed — especially after our fourteen-year record of having found and reprinted more Woolrich yarns than most people realized had ever been written by one of the real Masters of the modern suspense-chiller. But now we are happy to announce that we have successfully negotiated for another group of Woolrich stories, and will be able to maintain our fourteen-year average for at least the next two years.

So, during 1956, you can expect three more Woolrich spellbinders including "The Ice-Pick Murders" and "The Absent-Minded Murder." And during 1957, if all goes well, there will be another trio of thrillers including "Dead Roses" and "Mr. Spanish to the Rescue."

In the meantime, here is a wild and wooly Woolrich — a weirdie even from one of the Master's darkest moments (and surely Mr. Woolrich must have had his nights of dark terror). It is only fair to warn you that this is a gruesome, macabre tale: be sure you are not alone when you read it, and take our advice — keep all the lights on in the house . . .

ONE NIGHT TO BE DEAD SURE OF

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE GREAT DEPRESSION HAD GIVEN Miss Alfreda Garrity a bad fright. The one of '93, not the last one. She saw banks blow up all around her, stocks hit the cellar, and it did something to her common sense, finishing what a knockout blow from love had begun ten years before; it made the round-topped, iron-hooped trunk lying in a corner of her hotel room look good.

Her father, the late railroad president, Al Garrity, had left her well provided for for life, but when she

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got through, everything she owned was in that trunk in the room with her — $90,000 in old-fashioned napkin-size currency. She had a new lock put on the trunk, and a couple of new bolts on her room-door, which she hadn't been through since the night she was jilted, wedding dress and all, 520 weeks before. She had taken a considerable beating, but no depression could get at her from now on, and that was that.

So far so good, but within a year or so a variation had entered her foolproof scheme of things. Some blood-curdling rumor of inflation may have drifted in to her from the world outside. There was a guy named Bryan doing a lot of talking about silver. Either that, or the banknotes, beginning to show the wear and tear of being taken out, pawed over, and counted every night at bedtime, lacked attractiveness and durability for purposes of hoarding. After all, she lay awake worrying to herself, they were only pieces of printed paper. One day, therefore, she cranked up the handle on the wall-telephone ('96) and called one of the better-known jewelry firms on Maiden Lane.

The manager himself showed up that afternoon, bringing sample cases under the watchful eye of an armed guard. A $5,000 diamond brooch found its way into the trunk to glisten there unseen under all the dog-eared packets of banknotes. Pretty soon the bills were just a thin layer solidly bedded on a sparkling rockpile. By 1906 she had to quit that — she had run out of money and the rocks went to work for her. Their value doubled, tripled, quadrupled, as the price of diamonds skyrocketed. In that one respect, maybe she hadn't been so batty after all.

Meanwhile, she never stepped out of the room, and the only one she allowed in it was an old colored maid who brought her meals to her — and never dreamed what was in that mouldy old trunk in the corner. But all during the Twenties, an eerie figure would glide silently each night about the room, flashing prismatic fire from head to foot — a ghost covered with diamonds. There wasn't space enough on the rustling, white bridal gown to put them all, so she'd spread the rest around her on the floor and walk barefooted on a twinkling carpet of pins, brooches, bracelets, and rings. Sometimes tiny drops of red appeared on the sharp points of the faceted stones.

She knew her number was going to be up soon, and it got so she couldn't bear the thought of parting with them, leaving them behind. She called her lawyer in — the grandson of the man who had been her father's lawyer — told him her wishes in the matter and made out her will. She was to be buried in the vault her father had built for himself 50 years before; she was to go into it in her bridal dress, face veiled, and no one must look at her face once the embalmers were through with her. There

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must be a glass insert at the top of the coffin, and instead of the coffin being placed horizontally as in Christian burial, it was to be left standing upright as the Egyptians used to do. And all the diamonds in the trunk were to be sealed into the tomb with her, were to follow her into the next world; she wanted them left directly in front of the glass-slitted sarcophagus, where she could look at them through all eternity. She had no heirs, no relatives; nobody had a claim on them but herself; and she was going to take them with her.

"I charge you," she wheezed hectically, "on your professional honor, to see that this is carried out according to my instructions!"

The lawyer had expected something dippy from her, but not quite as bad as all that. But he knew her well enough not to try to talk her out of it; she would only have appointed a different executor — and goodbye diamonds! So the will was drawn up, signed, and attested. He was the last one to see her alive. She must have known just when it was coming. The old colored maid couldn't get in the next morning, and when they broke down the door they found her stretched out in her old yellowed wedding gown, orange-blossom wreath, satin slippers and all. This second bridegroom hadn't left her in the lurch like the first.

The news about the diamonds leaked out somehow, although it was the last thing the lawyer had wanted. The wedding-dress bier was good copy and had attracted the reporters like flies to honey. Then some clerk in his law office may have taken a peek while filing the will and let the cat out of the bag. The trunk had been taken from the room, secreted, and put under guard, but meanwhile the value of its contents had spurted to half a million, and the story got two columns in every evening paper that hit the newsstands. It was one of those "naturals." Everybody in the city was talking about it that first night . . . to forget about it just as quickly the next day.

Unfortunately for the peace of Miss Garrity's soul, there were two who took a professional interest in the matter instead of just an esoteric one. Chick Thomas's eye lighted on it on his way to the back of the paper where the racing charts were. He stopped, read it through once, and looked thoughtful; then he read it a second time and did some more thinking. When he had given it a third once-over, you could tell by his face he had something. He folded the paper tubularly to the exclusion of everything but this one item and called it to the attention of Angel Face Zabriskie by whacking it ecstatically across his nose. There was no offense in the blow, only triumph. "Get that," he said, sliding his mouth halfway toward his ear to pronounce the two words.

Angel Face read it and got it, just the way Chick wanted him to. They looked at each other. "How d'ya know it ain't just a lot of malarkey?

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Her mouthpiece won't admit or deny it, says here."

"Which proves they're going through with it," opined the cagey Chick. "He don't want it advertised, that's all. If they weren't gonna do it, he'd say no, wouldn't he? Don't you know mouths by now? Anytime one of 'em won't talk it means you've stolen a base on him."

Angel Face resumed cutting his corns with a razor blade. "So they're turning over the ice to the worms. So what's the rush? Let her cool off a while first before we get busy on the spade work — if that's what you got in mind."

Chick became wrathful. "No wonder I'm stuck here in a punk furnished room, teaming up with you! You got about as much imagination as the seat of my pants! Don't you know a haul when you see one? 'What's the rush?'" he mimicked nasally. 'No rush at all! Wait a week, sure, why not? And then find out somebody else has beat us to it! D'ya think we're the only two guys reading this paper tonight? Don't you think there's plenty of others getting the same juice out of it we are? Five hundred grand ain't unloaded into a cemetery every day in the week, you know. If I'd listen to you we'd prob'ly have to get in line and wait our turn to get near it —"

Angel Face tossed aside the razor blade, shook a sock out, and began putting it on. "Well, what's the answer?" he asked not unreasonably. "Hold up the hearse on its way out there? How do we know it'll be in the hearse?"

"Naw," snapped Chick, "it won't be in the hearse in the first place, and there'll prob'ly be enough armed guards around it to give an imitation of a shooting gallery if we tried that; that mouth of hers is no fool. Naw, here's the idea. It come to me like that — while I was reading about it." He snapped his fingers to illustrate the suddennes of the inspiration. "To be Johnny-on-the-spot and ring the bell ahead of all the other wise guys, one of us goes right into the burial vault all dressed in wood instead of the stiff they *think* they're planting. That's one angle none of the others'll think of, I bet!"

Angel Face threw a nauseated look up at him from shoe-level. "Yeah? Well, as long as you thought of it, you're elected."

His roommate squinted at the ceiling in exasperation. "They ain't burying her in sod! Don't you know what a mausoleum is yet? They're like little stone or marble houses. I've seen some of 'em. They got more room inside than this two-by-four rat-hole we're in now. They're just gonna leave her standing up in there. Wait, I'll read it to you —"

He swatted the paper across his thigh, traced a finger along the last few lines of print at the bottom. "'The burial will take place at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning at the Cedars of Lebanon Cemetery. The services will be strictly private. To discourage curiosity-seekers, Mr.

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Staunton has arranged for a detail of police to bar outsiders from the grounds both before and during the ceremonies. Whether the fantastic provisions of the will are to be carried out in their entirety and a huge fortune in jewelry cached in the crypt, could not be learned. It is thought likely, however, that because of the obvious risks involved it will be allowed to remain in the vault only a short time, out of regard to the wishes of the deceased, and will then be removed to a safer place. Funeral arrangements completed at a late hour last night, it is learned on good authority, call for the use of a specially constructed coffin with a glass "pane" at the top, designed and purchased several years ago by Miss Gerrity herself and held in readiness, somewhat after the old Chinese custom. The body is to be left standing upright. Pending interment, the remains have been removed to the Hampton Funeral Parlors —'"

Chick flicked his hand at the paper. "Which just about covers everything we needa know! What more d'ya want? Now d'ya understand why we gotta get right with it from the beginning? Outside of a lotta other mugs trying to muscle in, it says right here that they're only liable to leave it there a little while before they take it out again — maybe the very next day after, for all we know. We got only one night to be dead sure of. That's the night after the funeral — tomorrow night."

"Even so," argued Angel Face, "that still don't prove that two guys can't get at it just as quick from the outside as they can if one's outside and one's in."

"Where's yer brains? If we both stay outside we can't get to work until after dark when the cemetery closes, and even then there's a watchman to figure on. But if one guy's on the inside along with a nice little kit of files and chisels, he can get started the minute they close the works up on him, have the whole afternoon to get the ice out of the strongbox or trunk or whatever they put it in. Y'don't think they're gonna leave it lying around loose on the floor, do ya? Or maybe," he added witheringly, "you was counting on backing an express van up to the place and moving it out trunk and all?" He spat disgustedly at an opening between two of the floor-boards.

"Well, if the shack is stone or marble like you said, how we gonna crack it?"

"It's got a door just like any other place, ain't it?" roared Chick. Then quickly dropping his voice again. "How d'ya get at any door, even a bronze one? Take an impression of the key that works it! If we can't do that, then maybe we can pick the lock or find some other way. Anyhow, that part of it's the least; it's getting the ice ready to move out in a hurry that counts. We gotta be all set to slip right out with it. We can't hang around half the night showing lights and bringing it out a piece at a time."

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"Gee," admitted Angel Face, "the way you tell it, it don't sound so bad, like at first. I kept thinking about dirt being shoveled right on top of the coffin, and all like that. It ain't that I'm yellow or anything —"

"Naw," agreed his companion bitingly, "orange! Well, we'll settle that part of it right off before we do anything else, then we'll go up and look the place over, get a line on it." He produced a shining quarter. "I'll toss you for who goes in and who stays out. Heads it's you, tails it's me. How about it?"

Angel Face nodded glumly. The coin flashed up to within a few feet of the ceiling, spun down again. Chick cupped it neatly in his hollowed palm. He held his hand under the other's nose. Miss Liberty stared heartlessly up at them.

"O.K. Satisfied?" Chick dropped the coin back into a vest pocket, not the trouser pocket where he kept the rest of his small change. He'd had it for years; it had been given to him as a souvenir by a friend who had once been in the business, as an example of the curious accidents that beset even the best of counterfeiters at times. It had come from the die with a head stamped on both sides.

Angel Face was a little white around the gills. "Aw, I can't go through with it, Chick, it's no use. It gives me the heebies even to think about getting in the box in her place."

"Take a couple of stiff ones before you climb in, and it'll be over before you know it. They don't even lie you down flat, they just stand you up, and you got glass to look through the whole time — it's no different from being in a telephone booth." Then, still failing to note any signs of enthusiasm on the other's face, he kicked a chair violently out of the way and flung back his arm threateningly. "All right, blow, then! G'wan, ya yellowbelly, get outa here! I'll get me another partner! There's plenty of guys in this town would do more than that to get their mitts on a quarter of a million bucks worth of ice! All y'gotta do is stand still with a veil on your dome for half a day — and you're heeled for the rest of your life!"

Angel face didn't take the departure which had been so pointedly indicated. Instead he took a deep abdominal breath. "All right, pipe down, d'ya want everyone in the house to hear ya?" he muttered reluctantly. "How we gonna get in the place to look it over, like you said?"

Chick was already unbuckling a battered old valise. "I never believe in throwing away nothing. I used to have a fake press-card in here some place. I never knew till now why I hung onto it. Now I know. That and a sawbuck oughta fix it for us to see this grave-bungalow. We're a couple reporters sent up to describe it for our paper ahead of time." He shuffled busily through a vast accumulation of pawn tickets, dummy business cards, fake letters of introduction, forged traveler's checks, and other memorabilia of his salad days. Finally

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he drew something out. "Here it is. It got me on a boat once when the heat was on and I ducked across the pond —"

"Can two of us get by on one?" Angel Face wanted to know, studying it.

"Naw, cut out a piece of cardboard the same size and scribble on it, stick it in your hatband. I'll just flash this one and the gateman up there prob'ly won't know the diff." He kicked the valise back under the bed. "Let's go. Stick a pencil behind your ear and scratch something on the back of an envelope every now and then — and keep your trap shut; I'll do the rest of it."

They went trooping down the rickety rooming-house stairs, two gentlemen bound on engrossing business. They checked on the Cedars of Lebanon Cemetery in a directory in a candy store on the corner, and Chick bought three or four bars of milk chocolate wrapped in tinfoil, insisting that it be free of nuts, raisins, or any other filling. He stuck one piece in each of his four vest pockets, which was as close to his body as he could get it.

"It'll melt and run on ya," warned Angel Face as they made their way to the subway.

"Whaddya suppose I'm doing it for?" gritted the mastermind tersely. "Will ya shuddup or d'ya want me to land one on your loud-talking puss!"

"Aw, don't get so tempermental," subsided Angel Face. Chick was always like this when they were on a job. But he was good just the same — had that little added touch of imagination which he himself lacked, Angel Face realized. That was why he teamed with him, even though he was always the fall-guy.

They rode a Bronx train to the end of the line, then walked the rest of the distance on foot. Chick spoke once, out of the side of his face. "Not so fast, relax. These newspaper punks never hurry."

The cemetery was open. They strolled up to the gatekeeper's lodge. Angel Face looked about him in surprise. He had expected rows of moldering headstones and sunken graves. Instead it looked just like a big private estate. It was a class cemetery, no doubt about it. The most that could be seen from the perimeter was an occasional group of statuary, a tasteful pergola or two, all screened by leaves and shrubbery. There were even rustic benches of hewn logs set here and there along the winding paths. It was just like a park with tall cypress trees rustling in the wind. The set-up perked him up a lot. It wasn't such a bad place to spend a night — salary, $250,000. He let go a bar or two of *Casey Jones* and got a dig in the ribs from Chick's elbow.

The gatekeeper came out to them and Chick turned on the old personality. "Afternoon, buddy. We been sent up here to get a story on this tomb the old crow with the di'monds is going into tomorrow. We been told not to come back without it or we lose our jobs." He flashed the press-

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card, jerked his head at the one in Angel Face's hatband, and quickly put his own away again.

"What a way to earn a living," said the gatekeeper pessimistically. "Nearly as bad as my own. Help yourselves. You follow this main path all the way back, then turn off to your left. The Garrity mausoleum is about fifty yards beyond. You'll know it by the —"

Chick's paw dropped fraternally on the old codger's shoulder. "How about giving us a peek inside? Just so we can get a rough idea. You know yourself we haven't got a chance of getting near the place tomorrow. We don't want to take pitchers or anything — you can search us, we have no camera." Angel Face helpfully raised his arms to frisking position, then dropped them again.

"I couldn't, gents, I couldn't." The gatekeeper stroked the silver stubble on his face. "It would cost me my job if the trustees ever got wind of it." He glanced down sideways at the ten-spot poking into his breast-pocket from Chick's dangling hand.

"How's chances?" Chick slurred.

"About fifty-fifty." The old man grinned hesitantly. "Y'know these plots are private property. I ain't even supposed to butt into 'em myself —" But his eyes were greedily following the second sawbuck going in to join the first. Even Angel Face hadn't seen his partner take it out, it was that smooth.

"Who's gonna know the difference? It won't take a minute. We'll be out again before you know it." A third tenner was tapped down lightly on top of the other two.

The old man's eyes crinkled slyly. "I ain't supposed to leave my post here at the gate, not till we close up at 6 —" But he was already turning to go back into the lodge for something. Chick drooped one eyelid at Angel Face. The old man came out again with a hoop of thick, ponderous keys slung over his arm. He looked around him craftily. "Come on before anyone sees us," he muttered.

They started down the main path one on each side of him; Chick took the side he was carrying the keys on. He took out a chocolate bar, laid open the tinfoil, and took a very small nibble off one corner. Then he kept it flat up against his moist palm after that, holding it in place with his thumb.

"See that you get all this now," he ordered Angel Face across their guide's shoulders. "The Captain's putting himself out for us." Angel Face stripped the pencil from his ear and held the back of an envelope in readiness. "He takes the rough notes and I polish 'em up, work 'em into an article," explained Chick professionally.

"You young fellas must get good money," remarked the old man.

"Nothing to brag about. Of course, the office foots the bill for any extra expenses — like just now." Even an old lame-brain like this might figure $30 a pretty stiff tip coming from a leg-man.

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"Oh, no wonder," cackled the old fellow shrewdly. "So that's it!"

Chick secretly took out a second chocolate bar, stripped it open, and nipped it between his teeth. The gateman didn't notice that he now had two bars, one in each hand. Chick kept his palms inward and the bars didn't extend beyond his fingertips.

They turned off the main path without meeting anyone, followed a serpentine side-path up over a rise of ground, and just beyond came face to face with a compact granite structure, domed and about ten feet high. The path ended at its massive bronze door, flanked by two hefty stone urns and guarded by a reclining angel blowing a trumpet.

"Here she is," said the gatekeeper, and once again looked around. So did Chick, but for a different reason. Not very far ahead he could make out the tall iron railing that bounded the cemetery; the Garrity mausoleum, therefore, was near its upper limits, on the side farthest away from town. He peered beyond, searching hurriedly for an identifying landmark on the outside by which to locate it. It wasn't built up out there, just open country, but he could make out a gray thread of motor highway with a row of billboards facing his way. That was enough, it would have to do. He counted three of them, then a break, then three more.

He then turned his attention to the key the old man was fitting into the chunky door, lavishly molded into bas-reliefs of cherubs and whatnot, but grass-green from long exposure to the elements. The old man was having a lot of trouble with it, but Chick didn't dare raise his eyes to watch what was going on. When the door finally opened and the key dropped back to the ring again, Chick's eye rode with it, keeping it separate from all the rest even after it was back with them again. It was the fifth from one end of the bunch and seventh from the other, unless and until the old man inadvertently shifted the entire hoop around, of course — which would have been catastrophic. The hoop was nearly the size of a tricycle wheel.

Chick tilted his head behind the old man's back, caught Angel Face's eye, and gave him the signal. The gatekeeper was lugging the squealing, grinding door open with both arms, and the keys on the ring fluttered like ribbons with every move he made. Angel Face said, "Here, I'll help ya," as the door gave an unexpected lurch outward and he fell back against the gatekeeper. It was the old jostle-and-dip, which they had had down to a science even before they were in long pants.

Chick flipped that one certain key out from the rest with the point of his nail, deftly caught it on one bar of soft chocolate, and ground the other one down on top of it.

"Oops, sorry!" said Angel Face, and jerked the gateman forward again by one lapel, as if he had been in danger of falling over. Chick separated

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the two slabs, the released key fell back in line again, and by the time he had trailed into the dank place after the other two, he had the tinfoil folded back in place again and his handkerchief wrapped around the two bars to protect them from further softening through bodily warmth; they were in his breastpocket, now, where they were least likely to melt.

The gatekeeper didn't linger long inside the place with them, but that wasn't necessary any more. The floor of the vault was three feet below ground level, giving it a total height of about thirteen feet on the inside. A few steps led down from the doorway. The interior was in the shape of a cross, outlined by bastions of marble-faced granite that supported the dome. The head and one arm already contained coffins supported on trestles — Al Garrity and his wife respectively. Miss Garrity's was evidently going into the remaining arm. Macabre purple light filtered downward from a round tinted-glass opening in the exact center of the dome, so inaccessible from the floor that it might have been on some other planet. Even so, you could hardly see your hand in front of your face a short distance away from the open door. The place was icy cold and, once the door was closed, apparently air-tight. Chick wondered how long the supply of oxygen would last if anyone were shut up in there alive. Possibly a week; certainly more than twenty-four hours. He kept the thought to himself.

"You'd think," he heard Angel Face complain in the gloom, "they'd punch a winder or two in a place like this and let some light in."

"This one's about fifty years old," the old man explained. "Some of the newer ones they put up since has more light in 'em. There's one even has electric tapers at the head of the bier, going day and night, worked by battery."

"Ain't it unhealthy to leave the coffins above ground like this?" Chick asked.

"The bodies are preserved, embalmed in some way, I understand, before they're put in these kind of places. I s'pose if you was to open up one of these two they got here already you'd find 'em looking just like the day they got here. They don't change any, once they're here."

A sound resembling "*Brrh!*" came from Angel Face's direction; he retreated toward the doorway rather more quickly than he had come in. Chick took note of that fact: he could see that more build-up was in order.

On the way out he sized up the thickness of the wall, where the entrance cut through it. A solid two feet. And where the bastions encroached on the interior, God only knows! Pickaxes and even dynamite would have been out of the question. The only possible way was the one he had decided on.

Angel Face was scribbling away industriously on the back of an envelope when he came out after him, but his face looked strained. Chick pointed

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to the inner side of the bronze door; the keyhole ran all the way through. He furtively spread two fingers, folded them again. A key for each of them, that meant. If it was intended for encouragement, it didn't seem to do much good, and Chick didn't care to risk asking the old man whether a key used from the inside would actually work or not. Who the hell had any business letting themselves *out* of a tomb? And apart from that, he had a hunch the answer would have been no anyway.

"Well," said the old man as he took leave of them at the door of his lodge, "I hope you two young fellas hev gotten what you came here after."

Chick slung an arm about his shoulder and patted him reassuringly. "Sure did, old-timer, and much obliged to you. Well, be good."

"*Hunh*," the old reprobate snorted after them, "fat chance o' being anything but around these diggin's!"

They strolled aimlessly out the way they had come in, but with the ornamental stone and iron gateway once behind them Chick snapped into a sudden double-quick walk that rapidly took them out of sight. "C'mon, pick up your feet," he ordered, "before he feels for that pocket where he thinks he's got something!" He thrust the three tenners he had temporarily loaned the old man back into his own trousers.

"Gee!" exclaimed Angel Face admiringly.

"He's too old to enjoy that much dough anyway," commented Chick.

It was dusk when they came out of the subway. Chick, who was something of a psychologist, wisely didn't give his companion time to argue about the undertaking from this point on. He could tell by the other's long face that Angel Face was dying to back out, but he wouldn't give him the chance to get started. If he stayed with the idea long enough, he'd get used to it, caught up by the rush of their preparations.

"Got any dough?" he demanded as they came out on the sidewalk.

"Yeah, but listen Chick —" started the other.

"Here, take this." Chick handed him two of the tens. "Go to a hardware store and get an awl and a screwdriver — good strong ones; better get each one in a different place."

"Wha — what's the idea?" Angel Face's teeth were clicking a little.

"That's to let air in the coffin. Shut up and let me do the talking. Then get a couple of those tin boxes that workmen carry their lunches in — get the biggest size they come in." He saw another question trembling on his partner's lips, and quickly forestalled it. "To lug the ice away in, what d'ya suppose! If two ain't enough, get three. Get 'em so one'll fit inside the other when I bring 'em out there tomorrow night. Now y' got that? See that y'stick with it. That's your part of the job. Mine'll be to take these candy bars to a locksmith, have a pair of keys made, one for each of us —"

This, judging by the change that

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came over Angel Face's incorrectly named map, was the first good news he had heard since they had scanned the paper that morning.

"Oh, that's different," he sighed, "as long as I get one, too —"

"Sure, you can take it right in with you, hang it round your neck on a cord or something, just to set your mind at rest. That's what I tried to tip you off back there — the keyhole goes all the way through. But don't try using it ahead of time and ditching me, or I'll make you wish you'd stayed in there —"

"So help me, Chick, you know me better'n that! It's only in case something goes wrong, so I won't be left bottled up in there for the rest of my —"

"Y' got nothing to worry about," snarled Chick impatiently. "Now g'wan and do what I told you, and wait for me back at the room. I'll meet you there by midnight at the latest. This corpse beauty parlor she's at oughta be closed for the night by then. We got a jimmy home, haven't we?"

He didn't wait to be told but left with a jaunty step, bustling. Angel Face moved off slowly, like someone on his way to the dentist or the line-up.

Chick knew just where to have the keys made. He'd had jobs done there plenty of times in the past. It was in the basement of a side-street tenement and the guy kept his mouth closed, never asked questions, no matter what kind of a crazy mold you brought him. Chick carefully peeled the tinfoil off the chocolate bars.

The locksmith examined the impression. "How many you gonna need?"

"Two, but I want 'em made one at a time. Bring the mold out to me after you finish the first one — the second one's gotta be a little different." He wasn't putting anyone in the way of walking off with half a million dollars' worth of jewels under his nose, maybe only an hour before he got there. To hand Angel Face a key that really worked was like pleading for a doublecross. He'd see that he got out all right, but not till he was there to let him out.

"Take about twenty minutes apiece," said the locksmith.

"I'll wait. Get going on 'em."

The locksmith came back with one completed key for inspection, and the two halves of the mold, which he'd had to glaze with some kind of wax. "Sure it works, now?" Chick scowled.

"It fits — that's all I can tell you."

"All right, then here's what you do now." He scraped a nailful of chocolate off the underside of each bar, troweled it microscopically into the impression, smoothed it over, obliterating one of the three teeth the key had originally possessed. "Make it that way this time." He tucked the first key away to guard against confusion.

The locksmith gave him the mold back when he had finished the job, and Chick kneaded the paraffined

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chocolate into a ball and dropped it down the sewer. Angel Face's key had a piece of twine looped to it, all ready to hang around his neck.

An amulet against the horrors — that was about all it was really good for.

The Hampton Funeral Parlor was dolled up so that it almost looked like a grill or tap-room from the outside. It had a blue neon sign and colored mosaic windows and you expected to see a hat-check girl just inside the entrance. But after midnight it would probably be dark and inconspicuous enough for a couple of gents to crack without bringing down the town on their heads.

Chick managed to size up the lock on the door without exactly loitering in front of it. A glass-cutter was out; in the first place the door-pane was wire-meshed, and in the second place it had to be done without leaving any tell-tale signs, otherwise there might be an embarrassing investigation when they opened up in the morning. Embarrassing for Angel Face, anyway. A jimmy ought to do the trick in five minutes; that kind of place didn't usually go in for electric burglar-alarms.

When he arrived back in the room he found Angel Face pacing back and forth until the place rattled. At least he had brought in the lunch boxes, the awl, and the screwdriver. Chick examined them, then looked over the jimmy and packed that too. Angel Face's frantic meandering kept up all around him. "Quit that!" he snapped. He opened a brown-paper bag crammed with sandwiches he had brought in with him. "Here, wrap yourself around one of these —"

Angel Face took a huge mouthful, chewed once or twice, finally gave up. "I ain't hungry. I can't seem to swaller," he moaned.

"You're gonna be hungry!" warned Chick mercilessly. "It's your last chance to eat until t'morra night about this time. Here's your key — hang it around your neck." He tossed over the dummy with the two teeth. "I got a bottle of rye for you, too, but you take that the last thing — before we leave."

When they let themselves out of the house at 1 A.M., Angel Face followed docilely enough. Chick had also done a little theatrical browbeating and brought up a lot of past jobs which Angel Face wouldn't have been keen to have advertised. It hadn't seemed to occur to him that neither would Chick, for that matter. Angel Face wasn't very quick on the uptake.

Chick glanced at him as they came out the front door of the rooming-house, swept Angel Face's hat off with a backhand gesture, and let it roll over to the curb. "They don't plant 'em in snap-brim felts, especially old ladies — and I ain't wearing two back when I leave!" Angel Face gulped silently. "You can get yourself a gold derby by Wednesday, like trombones wear, if you feel like it."

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They had walked briskly past the Hampton Chapel, now dark and deserted, as if they had no idea of stopping there at all, then abruptly halted a few yards up the side-street. "Stay here up against the wall and keep back," breathed the nerveless Chick. "Two of us ganged up at the entrance would make too much of an eyeful. I'll whistle when I'm set."

Chick's cautious whistle came far too quickly to suit Angel Face. He sort of tottered around to where the entrance was and dove into the velvety darkness. Chick carefully closed the door again so it wouldn't be noticeable from the outside. "It was a pushover," he whispered, "I coulda almost done it with a toothpick!" He went toward the back, flickering a small torch once or twice, then gave a larger dose to the room beyond. "No outside windows," he said. "We can use their own current. Turn it on and close the door."

Angel Face was moistening his lips and having trouble with his Adam's apple, staring glassy-eyed at the two shrouded coffins the place contained. Otherwise it wasn't so bad as it might have been. Black and purple drapes hung from the walls, and the floor and ceiling were spotless. The embalmers, if they actually did their work here, had removed all traces of it. Of the two coffins, one was on a table up against the wall, the other on a draped bier out in the middle, each with an identifying card pinned to its pall.

"Here she is," said Chick, peering through the glass pane, "all ready for delivery." Angel Face looked over his shoulder, then jerked back as though he had just had an electric shock. A veiled face had met his own through the glass. He turned almost blue.

Chick went over to the second one, against the wall, stripped it, and callously sounded it with his knuckles. "This one's got somebody in it too," he announced. He unburdened himself of his tools, went back to the first coffin, and started in on the screws that held down the lid. He heaved it a little out of line so that it overlapped the bier. "Get down under it and get going on some air-holes with that awl. Not too big, now! They'll have to be on the bottom so they won't be noticed."

"Right while — while she's in it?" croaked Angel Face, folding to his knees.

"Certainly — we don't wanna be here all night!"

They gouged and prodded for a while in silence. "You ain't told me yet," Angel Face whimpered presently. "Once I'm in it, how do I get out again? Do I hafta wait for you to come back and unscrew me?"

"Certainly not, haven't ya got any sense at all? You take this screwdriver I'm using in with you. Then you just bust the glass from the inside, stretch out your arms, and go to work down the front of it yourself."

"I can't reach the bottom screws from where I'll be. How am I gonna bend —"

"Y'don't have to! Just get rid of

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the upper ones and then push out — it'll split the rest of the way. I'm not gonna put them back too tight."

Angel Face was still underneath when he heard Chick put down the screwdriver and dislodge something. "There we are! Gimme a hand with this." He straightened up and looked.

A fragile doll-like figure lay revealed, dressed in yellowed satin and swathed from head to foot in a long veil. They stood the lid up against the bier. "Get her out," ordered Chick, "while I get started on that second one over there." But Angel Face was more rigid than the form that lay on the satin coffin-lining; he couldn't lift a finger toward it.

When the second coffin was unlidded, Chick came back and without a qualm picked up the mortal remains of Miss Alfreda Garrity. He carried her over to the second coffin — a larger one — deposited her on top of the rightful occupant, whipped off the veil, and then forced down the lid. Angel Face was giving little moans like a man coming out of gas. "Get in there a while and try it out," his partner advised him briskly.

It took Chick ten minutes to screw the lid back on the one that now held the two of them, then he carefully dusted it with his handkerchief and came back. Angel Face had both legs in the first coffin and was sitting up in it, hanging onto the sides with both hands and shivering, his face glossy with sweat.

"Get all the way in — see if it fits!" Chick bore down on his shoulders remorselessly. "You won't be a bit cramped. All right, did you punch them air-holes all the way through? If you didn't you'll suffocate. Now we'll try it out with the lid and veil on. Keep your head down!"

He brought the veil over and spread it across Angel Face's wincing countenance. Then he lifted the heavy lid off the floor, placed it over the coffin, and fitted it in place. He peered down through the glass pane, studying the mummified onion-head that showed below. He retreated, gauged the effect from a distance, then came back again to the opposite side. Finally he dislodged the lid once more. Angel Face instantly sat up, like a jack-in-the-box. He tossed the veil off and blew out his breath.

"D'ja have any trouble getting air?" Chick asked anxiously.

"There coulda been more."

"All right, stay there — I'll put a few more holes in to be on the safe side." Chick went to work from below with the screwdriver.

When he was finished, Chick examined the glass insert in the lid. "It's kinda thick at that. Maybe you better take something in with you to make sure of smashing it. Wait a minute, I think I saw —"

He came back in a few moments with a small iron mallet that had two or three links of filed-off chain dangling from it. "Just a tap from this'll do the trick for you. There's room enough to use your arms if you bring 'em up close to you. One more thing and we're set: watch your breathing

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— see that it don't flutter the veil. I'm gonna bulge it loose around you, so it won't get in the way of your beak." He scrutinized the other shrewdly. "Ready?"

Angel Face climbed back in resignedly.

Chick tucked the screwdriver under one armpit, the iron mallet under the other, then once more arranged the veil about his henchman's head and shoulders, this time leaving a large pocket through which Angel Face could draw breath without moving the veil.

"Don't forget to have the ice loose when I show up," ordered Chick. "See ya t'morra night about this time." He put the lid back on, and ten minutes later it was screwed firmly in place. One coffin was as silent as the other. . . .

Chick turned the lights out and silently eased out of the room. He locked the front door on the inside, so they wouldn't know it had been tampered with, let himself out of one of the ornamental windows on the side-street, and pulled it shut after him. They'd probably never even notice it had been left unlatched all night.

Chick was standing across the street next morning at half-past 10 when the funeral procession started out for the cemetery. So were a sprinkling of others, drawn by curiosity. The dumbbells probably thought the jewels were going right with her in the coffin. Fat chance. He saw the coffin brought out and loaded onto the hearse, the tasseled pall still covering it. So far so good, he congratulated himself; they hadn't tumbled to anything after opening the parlor for the day, not even the air-holes on the bottom, and the worst was now over. Forty minutes more and nothing Angel Face could do would be able to hurt them. He could bust out and stretch to his heart's content.

Only one car followed the hearse, probably with her lawyer in it. Chick let the small procession get started, then flagged a taxi and followed. Even if outsiders hadn't been barred during the services, he couldn't have risked going into the cemetery because of the danger of running into that gatekeeper again; but it wouldn't do any harm to swipe a bird's-eye view. The hearse and the limousine tailing it made almost indecent time, but he didn't have any trouble keeping up with them. He got out across the way from the main entrance just as they were going through, and parked himself at a refreshment stand directly opposite, over a short root beer.

The gates were closed again the minute the cortège was inside, and the two guys loitering in front were easily identifiable as dicks. Chick saw them turn away several people who tried to get in. Then they came forward, the gates swung open again, and a small armored truck whizzed through without slowing down. There, Chick told himself, went Miss Garrity's diamonds. Smart guy, her law-

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yer; nobody could have tackled that truck on the *outside* without getting lead poisoning.

Chick hung around until the hearse, the limousine, and the truck had come out again, about 25 minutes later. They were all going much slower this time, and the gates stayed open behind them. It hadn't taken them long. You could tell the old doll had no relatives or family. The dicks swung onto the running board of the limousine, got in with the lawyer — and that was that. He and Angel Face had got away with it! There could no longer be any slip-up.

At midnight, with the big lunch box that held two other ones under his arm, he bought more sandwiches. Not to feed the imprisoned Angel Face, but to spread out on top of the rocks after they were packed in the boxes, in case any nosey cops decided to take a gander.

It was a long ride to the end of the line, but he knew better than to take a taxi this time. The stem along the motor highway around and to the back of the Cedars of Lebanon, to where those billboards faced the mausoleum, was even longer, but he was in no hurry — he had all night. In about 30 minutes he came to them — three and then a blank space and then three more, lighted up by reflectors.

He turned off the road to his right and went straight forward, and in about ten minutes more the tall iron pike-fence of the cemetery blocked him. There wasn't a living soul for miles around; an occasional car sped by, 'way back there on the road. He pitched the telescoped lunch boxes up over the fence, then sprang for the lateral bar at the top of the railing, and chinned himself up and over. It wasn't hard. He dropped down soundlessly inside, picked up the lunch boxes, and in another five minutes he was slipping the key into the bronze door.

You could tell how thick it was by how far the key went in. When only the head showed, he caught it between the heels of his palms and tried turning it. The key wouldn't budge. No wonder the gatekeeper had had a tough time of it yesterday afternoon! He gave it more pressure, digging in with his feet to brace himself as he turned.

Had they changed the lock after the services? Had the chocolate mold got just a little too soft and spread the impression? Maybe he should have brought a little oil with him. He was sweating like a mule, half from the effort and half from fear. He gave a final heave and there was a shattering click — but it wasn't the door. He was holding the key-handle in his bruised paws, and the rest of the key was jammed in the lock, where it had broken off short.

No one had ever been cursed the way that locksmith was for bungling the job. Chick swore and almost wept, and he clawed and dug at it, but he couldn't get the key out — it was wedged tight in the lock. Then he

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thought of the glass skylight, up in the exact center of that rounded inaccessible dome. He went stumbling off through the darkness.

It was nearly 3 when he was back again, with the length of rope coiled up around his middle under his coat. He unwound it, paid it out around him on the ground. There weren't any trees near enough, so he had to use that angel blowing a trumpet over the door. He put a slip-knot in the rope, hooked the angel easily enough, and got up on the bottom of the dome. Then he pulled the rope after him. He got up on the top of the dome by cat-walking around to the opposite side from the angel and then pulling himself up with the rope taut across the top. One big kick and a lot of little ones emptied the opening of the violet glass. The crash coming up from inside was muffled. It was pitch-black below. He dropped the rope inside, gave it a half-twist around his wrist, let himself down, and began to swing wildly around.

Suddenly all tension was out of the rope and he was hurtling down, bringing it squirming loosely after him. He would have broken his back, but he hit a large wreath of flowers on top of a coffin. One of the trestles supporting it broke and it boomed to the floor. He and gardenias and leaves and ribbons all went sliding down to the mosaic floor. An instant later the stone angel's head dropped like a bomb a foot away from his own. It was enough to have brained him if it had touched him.

He was scared sick, and aching all over. "Angel!" he rasped hoarsely, spitting out leaves and gardenia petals, "Angel! Are y'out? J'get hit?" No answer. He fumbled for his torch — thank-God it worked! — and shot streaks of white light around the place, creating ghastly shadows of his own making. Her mother's coffin was there in one wing and her father's in the other, like yesterday, and the diamonds were there in an old trunk, with the lid left up. And this — this third coffin that he had hit, that he was on now. Angel Face should have been out of it long ago — but it was still sealed up! Had he croaked in it?

Bruised as he was, Chick scrambled to his feet, swept aside the leaves and flowers, and flicked his beam up and down the bared casket. A scream choked off in his larynx — there was no glass insert, no air-holes. It was the other coffin — the one he'd put her in with the unknown body!

What followed was a madhouse scene. He set the torch down at an angle, picked up the chipped angel's head, crashed it down on the lid again and again, until the wood splintered, and he could claw it off with his bare, bleeding hands. There beneath his eyes was the gaunt but rouged and placid face of Miss Alfreda Garrity, teeth showing in a faintly sardonic smile. She could afford to smile; she had put one over on them, even in death — landed in her own tomb after all, through some ghastly blunder at the mortician's. Maybe he had been the cause of it

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himself: those two palls, each with a little card pinned to it. He must have transposed them in his hurry last night. And they hadn't looked! Incredible as it sounded, they hadn't looked to make sure — they had carried it out with the pall over it, and even here hadn't uncovered it, in a hurry to get rid of the old eccentric, forgetting to give her the eternal gander through the glass at her rocks that she had wanted!

What difference did it make how it happened, or that it had never happened before and might never happen again — it had happened now! And he was in here, bottled up in his stooge's place, with a broken rope and nothing to cast it over, and no way of getting back up again! Not even the mallet and screwdriver he had provided the other guy with! The scream came then, without choking off short, and then another and another, until he was out of them and his raw vocal cords couldn't make any more sounds, and daylight showed through the shattered skylight, so near and yet so out of reach. He began banging the angel's head against the bronze door, until it was just little pebbles and the muscles of his arms were useless . . .

It was afternoon when they cut through the door with blow-torches. Cops and dicks had never looked so good to him before in his life. He wanted twenty years in prison — anything — if only they'd get him out of here. He was, they told him, pretty likely to get what he wanted — with his past record. He was groveling on the floor, whimpering, half batty, picking up shiny pieces of jewelry and letting them dribble through his fingers. They almost felt sorry for him themselves.

Her lawyer was there with them. "Outrageous! Sickening!" he stormed. "I knew something like this was bound to happen, with all that damnable publicity her will got —"

"Other coffin," the haggard Chick kept moaning, "other coffin." His voice came back when someone gave him a shot of whiskey, then rose to a screech. "The other coffin! My partner's in it! There's a living man in it, I tell you! They got them mixed. Phone that place! Stop them before they —"

Some of the dicks raced off. They met him near the entrance, as they were leading Chick out. Their faces were a funny green color. "They — they planted it at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, at Hillcrest Cemetery, out on Long Island —"

"In the ground?" someone asked in a sick voice.

"Six feet under."

"God in Heaven!" shuddered Staunton, the lawyer. "What abysmal fools these crooks are sometimes! All for a mess of paste. They might have known I wouldn't put the real ones in there, will or no will! They've been safely tucked away in a vault since the night she died." He broke off suddenly. "Hold that man up, I think he's going to collapse."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELLERY QUEEN**

TITLE: ***The Black Ledger***

TYPE: Suspense-Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Ellery Queen

LOCALES: New York, Washington, D. C., and all points between

COMMENTS: *About one of the most infamous and historic volumes in the library of American crime — truly, a monstrous book . . .*

THE CASE OF THE BLACK LEDGER was one of the biggest cases Ellery ever undertook, and its size was not reduced by the littleness of the effort involved. It consisted merely in acting as an errand boy, the errand being to take the ledger from the City of New York to Washington, D. C.

Why the transportation from one city to another of an account book worth perhaps three dollars should be a problem, why Ellery was the messenger instead of a federal agent, why he deliberately set forth on his mission alone, without even a weapon . . . the answers to these engrossing questions may be found in the proper place, which is not here. This story begins where that one ends.

In appearance the Black Ledger was unexciting. It had a hard binding lined with black leatherette which was scraped along the edges, its dimensions were six inches by eight and one-half inches, and it contained 52 thick, limp ledger pages rule-printed in blue and red lines, and all rather dirty. And yet it was one of the most infamous and historic volumes in the library of American crime. For on the blue lines of those 52 jammed pages were written the names and the addresses of all the important regional distributors of illegal narcotics in the United States, and the list was in the handwriting of the master of the ring.

In the spreading epidemic of dope addiction which was plaguing the 48 states, the federal authorities wanted this list desperately. The Black Ledger was a monstrous indiscretion, and to keep it from reaching Wash-

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ington the quiet monster who had compiled it would stop at literally nothing. The two government agents who secured possession of it paid for their triumph with their lives. But by that time the Black Ledger was — for the moment — safe in New York.

At this point Ellery entered the problem.

The place where he examined the ledger and accepted the mission and prepared to carry it out was, they were positive, under surveillance. The chieftain of this continent-wide criminal organization was no petty gang lord. He was a genius of withered soul, with immense power, resources, and connections. Ordinary methods were bound to fail against him. At the least, a show of force on the spot might turn the entire area into a bloody battlefield, causing the deaths of innocent people. So Ellery's plan was accepted.

A drawing room on the Capitol Limited was reserved for him officially by telephone, and at the appointed time Ellery went down into the streets.

The fall day was gray, with raw skies, and Ellery had hung an umbrella with a bamboo handle over his left arm. He was wearing a lined topcoat and he carried a brief case.

Ellery seemed unaware that from the instant his foot touched the pavement his life expectancy dwindled almost to the vanishing point. Smoking his big brier pipe placidly, he stepped to the curb and glanced around as if for a taxicab.

Two things happened at once. His arms were seized from behind and a seven-passenger sedan shot to the curb and blocked him off.

The next moment he was in the car, prisoner of four large men whose complete silence was more quieting than threats.

Ellery was not surprised when the sedan deposited them at Pennsylvania Station and three of his four silent captors strolled him unarguably through Gate 3 down into the Capitol Limited and Drawing Room A of the fifth car, which was his reservation. Two of the large men took him in and one of them carefully bolted the drawing-room door.

As Ellery had expected, the monster was waiting for him. He occupied the best armchair — an immaculately dressed man of middle age with grudging pale hair parted cleverly in the middle and hot, sore-looking eyes. This creature was a millionaire, thought Ellery, a millionaire who had made his millions by destroying the will and health and future of thousands of foolish people, many of them adolescents.

And Ellery said, "You had the phone tapped, of course."

The narcotics king did not reply. He glanced at the larger of his two strong-arm men, the one with the boneless nose.

Nose said instantly, "He didn't speak to nobody when he come out. Nobody come near him. He didn't touch nothing. He didn't drop nothing."

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The monster in the chair glanced at the other large man, the one with the tic in his right eyelid.

"Nobody else gets out up there," said Tic. "And Al is keeping in touch by the train phone from the lounge."

The sore eyes now turned their full animal suffering on Ellery. "You want to live?" He had a soft, womanish voice.

"As much as the next man," said Ellery, trying to keep his tongue from rattling.

"Then hand it over."

Ellery swallowed and said, "Oh, come."

Nose grinned, but the monster said to him, "No. First open his bag."

Nose dumped the contents of Ellery's brief case on the floor. It consisted of a single object, a crisp new Manhattan telephone directory.

"Nothing else in the bag?"

"Not a thing." Nose tossed the empty brief case to one side. He picked up the big directory and riffled it twice.

"Screwy thing to be lugging around," remarked Tic.

"My favorite train reading," said Ellery. He felt urgently like asking for a drink of water, but he decided against it.

"Not in here," said Nose.

"His coat and hat."

Nose shucked him like an ear of corn while Tic examined Ellery's snapbrim.

"It wouldn't be in here," he complained. "It's too big."

Nose jeered. "With the cover it's too big. This is a smart operator. He tore out the pages and crumbled 'em."

"But fifty-two pages," protested Tic.

The monster said nothing. His red glance was fixed on the furled umbrella, which Ellery had retrieved and was clutching. Suddenly he reached over and yanked. He removed the umbrella cover slowly and slowly pressed the catch and pushed. The umbrella opened. After a moment he tossed it away.

Nose said, "Not in the coat." The lining lay on the floor; he had torn the pockets out, and had ripped open the seams wherever the material doubled over.

"Strip him."

Ellery felt his knees buckle under the pain of Nose's grip. Tic did the stripping, without kindness. Sore Eyes watched the denuding process with the unblinking patience of a crocodile.

"Leave me my shorts!" said Ellery angrily.

They left him nothing. Mother-naked, he was permitted to wrap himself in the wreck of his topcoat, crouch in a chair, and smoke his pipe. It tasted like fuming brass, but it gave him comfort.

He reached for the Manhattan telephone book just as the Capitol Limited pulled out of Pennsylvania Station. He knew that the conductor was taken care of and that there would be no interruptions until he reached Washington — if indeed he ever reached it.

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But he was wrong. At Newark, when the train stopped, a man entered the drawing room. Nose called him Doc. Doc, a fat little man with three chins and no hair, was carrying a black bag. He eyed Ellery with the brisk anticipation of a professor approaching the cadaver tank in a dissecting room.

Ellery clutched the Manhattan directory and braced himself.

The Limited was roaring through New Brunswick when Doc, busily at work, referred to himself jestingly as Secretary of the Interior. By the time the train was rolling into the Trenton station Doc was no longer jesting: he was perspiring.

Shutting his bag, he made his report to the man in the armchair in a strained voice.

It was negative.

The man in the armchair said to Tic, "Tell Al to phone Philly. I want Jig with some equipment." Then he looked at Ellery and for the first time showed his false teeth in a nightmarish smile. "Secret writing," he said softly. "Just in case."

Jig got on at North Philadelphia. At Wilmington, Nose made some exterior reports, and Jig completed them. Jig was a tall skinny man with no shoulders and a clubfoot.

The Black Ledger, whole or in parts, was not in Ellery's suit, as the ruins of his trousers and jacket testified. His shirt, necktie, undershirt, shorts, and socks had been carefully manhandled. His shoes had been tapped, probed, slit, and all but turned inside out. Even his belt, an unmistakably single strip of cowhide, had been cut apart.

All his possessions were on display. Keys and coins were pronounced solid. His wallet contained 97 dollars, a money order stub, a New York State operator's license, a dues receipt from the Mystery Writers of America, five business cards, and seven jottings of ideas for stories. His check book had been gone over page by page, including the stubs. His tobacco pouch had been found to contain only pipe tobacco, and an unopened pack of cigarettes was opened and found to contain only cigarette tobacco and perfectly innocent cigarette paper. A letter from his publisher demanded the return of galley proofs three weeks overdue, and a letter postmarked Orangeburg, New York, from a man signing himself Yore Frend Joe threatened to kill Ellery Queen unless Ellery Queen saved the writer from being killed by an invisible enemy.

And Jig caressed his Adam's apple and said that nothing from, on, or about the guy concealed secret writing — nothing. This covered every surface capable of taking a fluid impression, not excluding the guy's epidermis. Jig used the word epidermis.

By this time they were approaching Elkton, Maryland.

The monster sucked his lower lip in silence.

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"Maybe," said Nose in the silence, "maybe he memorized the names . . . huh?"

"Yeah!" Tic looked relieved. "They could still have the book back in New York and he's carrying it all in his head."

The man in the chair looked up. "There's twenty-eight names to a page, and fifty-two pages — almost fifteen hundred names. Who is he, Einstein?" He said suddenly, "That phone book you picked up again. What's the gag?"

Ellery tamped a fresh load into his pipe to give his fingers something to do. "Some people relax with mystery stories. I can't — I write them. The phone book does it for me."

"I bet." The sore eyes glittered. "Jig, give that book the business!"

Nose tore it from Ellery's hand.

"But I've already tested it for secret writing," said Jig.

"To hell with secret writing. We're after a list of names. And in a New York phone book you got about every kind of name there is! Look for marks next to names — pinpricks, pencil dots, impressions of nails — anything!"

"Would someone mind," Ellery asked plaintively, "giving me a light?"

They were pulling into Washington when Jig came back from the compartment in which he had set up his impromptu laboratory.

"No marks," he mumbled. "No nothing. It's just the way it came off the press."

"And nobody's still tried to leave that joint in New York we got covered," muttered Tic. "Al phoned from Baltimore."

The man in the chair said slowly, "So he's a decoy after all. They figured they'd pull us off with him while somebody else got away. Only they got another figure coming. Sooner or later the real boy scout's got to try to sneak out of that buidling. Tic, get Al to phone New York and tell Manno if anybody gets away he can start cutting his own throat . . . Okay, you." He looked at Ellery. "You can get dressed now."

The Capitol Limited was standing in the Washington terminal when Ellery, looking more like a hobo than a respectable gentleman-writer-detective, picked up his umbrella and said with pale whimsicality, "Do I get shot in the back as I leave, or are all bets off?"

"Wait a minute," said the monster.

"Yes?" said Ellery, nervously gripping his umbrella.

"Where you going with the umbrella?"

"Umbrella?" Ellery glanced blankly down at it. "Why, you examined this yourself — "

"So that was it," and now the womanish voice had a vicious sting. "I examined it, all right — the wrong part! *It's in the bamboo handle.* You rolled up the pages of the ledger and stuffed them into the hollow head of that bumbershoot! Take it from him!"

Ellery found himself in Tic's grip staring fascinated as Nose demolished the handle of the umbrella.

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And when it was thoroughly demolished there was nothing on the floor of the drawing room but some curved splinters of bamboo.

The monster rose, his sore eyes smoldering. "Boot him," he choked, "boot him out of here!"

Twenty-six minutes later Ellery was escorted into the private office of a very important executive of a very important branch of the government in a very important building in Washington.

"I'm the messenger from New York," said Ellery, "and I've brought you the Black Ledger."

Ellery did not see the monster again until the trial in federal court. They met in the corridor during a recess. The narcotics king was surrounded by bailiffs and lawyers and newspapermen, and he was looking exactly like a criminal who expects the worst. Nevertheless, the moment he spied Ellery his face brightened and he jumped forward, seized Ellery by the arm, and pulled him aside.

"Keep those monkeys away from here a minute!" he shouted, and then he said piteously, "Queen, you're a life-saver. This thing's been driving me bats. Ever since you outsmarted me on that damn train, I've been asking myself how you did it. It wasn't on you, it wasn't in you, it wasn't in that phone book or umbrella. So where was it? Would you please tell me?"

"I don't mind kicking a man when he's down," said Ellery coldly, "not when he's a so-called man like you. Certainly I'll tell you. The phone book and umbrella were red herrings. I had to keep you occupied with your own royal cleverness. The ledger never left my hand."

"What are you giving me?" howled the monster.

"It was the size of the ledger and the quantity of its contents that threw you. You never stopped to think that size and quantity can be reduced."

"Huh?"

"Microfilm," said Ellery. "Thirteen feet of film less than a half-inch in width. When it was wound up in a tight roll . . ."

"But in your *hand*," said the monster dazedly. "I'd have bet a million to one you couldn't have palmed anything!"

"I'd hardly have taken a foolish risk like that," said Ellery. "No, the roll of film was in something — in fact, in two things. And I kept applying matches to it regularly all the way from New York to Washington."

"Matches! You set *fire* to it?"

"Nice touch, don't you think? Oh, it was in a fireproof container — an old cartridge shell just big enough to hold it, and capped tightly. The container was tucked away in the bottom of my pipe bowl — the only thing I carried you didn't search. It made a brassy smoke," said Ellery, "but when I think of all those kids who've learned to smoke your marijuana and shoot themselves full of your heroin, I'd say it was worth it — wouldn't you?"

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We are delighted to bring you the newest adventure of Hildegarde Withers and Inspector Oscar Piper — the latest blow-by-blow account of what has been called their "affectionately antagonistic relationship." Hildegarde, of course, is the equine-faced spinster schoolteacher whose hats resemble nothing more than fallen soufflés, and the Inspector is that gray little leprechaun of a man who is constantly the fly to Miss Withers's gad . . . At the time of this writing it looks mighty like we'll all be seeing Hildegarde on TV. Present plans call for Agnes Moorehead (that fine actress) in the role of Miss Withers, and Paul Kelly (that fine actor) in the role of Inspector Piper. Good luck and happy viewing! . . . And now the tale of Hildegarde and the Bigamist — the modern Don Juan whose wife disappeared on their honeymoon cruise . . . and what a criminal for our strait-laced Hildy to be tracking down!

HILDEGARDE AND THE SPANISH CAVALIER

by STUART PALMER

THERE WERE TIMES, AND THIS WAS one of them, when Inspector Oscar Piper wished he had taken up some line of work other than man-hunting. Such was his deep depression, as he sat that morning at his littered desk in the offices of the New York homicide division at Centre Street, that he barely winced when he heard a familiar voice greeting him from his doorway.

"Oscar," cried Miss Hildegarde Withers. "Do you know what day tomorrow is?"

"Thursday," he grunted. "All day."

"*And* the twelfth of March!" The wind and rain outside had left the maiden schoolteacher's hat looking like nothing other than a fallen *soufflé*. She plumped herself down in a chair and waited, with obvious expectancy.

The Inspector frowned in mock concentration. "Let me see. Can't be your birthday — you stopped having those years ago. Wait! Is it the anniversary of the day we *didn't* get married?"

"It is not — I jilted you in the autumn. Stop pretending to be so dense. I can see very well whose file it is that you have spread out on your desk, so you are already aware of who is being graduated from Sing Sing tomorrow."

"Juan del Puerto!" exploded Oscar

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Piper. "And just why are you so interested in the Spanish Cavalier? I admit he's good-looking, if you like the dark, oily type . . ."

She sniffed. "I happen to have a natural antipathy to Lotharios who prey on defenseless, middle-aged women. And so should you — the way he made monkeys out of the police! You were all so positive that he killed the lady doctor he had married, and somehow disposed of the body on the honeymoon cruise to Tampico. Imagine going to all the trouble of having him extradited, and then finding that you couldn't pin anything on him but a bigamy charge — and a weak one at that!"

"Oh, yes?" Piper's fist hit the desk so hard that the cigar butts in his ashtray sailed up into the air and looped the loop. "Well, when the gendarmes finally ran him down in Mexico City he was shacked up in a hotel with this other wife — Consuelo or something — and she was wearing part of Maggie Gustavson's trousseau and all her jewelry. We even proved that he had bought half a dozen cartons of safety-razor blades just before sailing day —"

"So if he didn't murder her, who did? The customary police attitude. If Maggie wasn't killed, and her body cut up with razor blades and thrown out of the porthole piece by piece, then why didn't she come forward and say so? Why did she never make any effort to communicate with her sisters in Newark, or to recover the money she had turned over to del Puerto just before the wedding bells chimed? The newspapers still hint that it was the Perfect Murder — and now, after only five years in prison, the man goes scot-free!" Miss Withers shook her head. "Something has got to be done, Oscar."

All this, to the Inspector, was like turning a knife in an open wound. "All right, Miss Smartypants," he snapped. "What can we do that we *haven't* done? I took pains to see that del Puerto didn't get parole or any time off for good behavior; he served every day of it. I tried to block his recovering Maggie's life savings, which he was wearing in a money-belt when arrested, only he's now got Matt Sherwood for his lawyer, and all they have to do — once he's out — is to apply for a court order, which is just a formality. Nobody can prove that it wasn't a free gift to him before the marriage, like he swears. Maybe she did — women of a certain age, particularly pent-up, inhibited women who have never had time for love, usually fall hard when they fall, and do foolish things that they regret later."

"I never did a foolish thing in my life," the schoolteacher retorted. "At least, not one I have regretted. Except perhaps not marrying you twenty-years ago."

He grinned. "Thanks, Hildegarde. Anyway, I've lost plenty nights' sleep trying to figure out some way to get that guy, but all I could think of was to tip off the immigration authorities to give him the bum's rush out of the country the minute they can —"

"Oscar!" she cried. "You must un-

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tip them, and at once! Remember the Uncle Remus story about Brer Rabbit, who was caught by the Fox and who screamed, 'Do anything you like, but *don't* throw me into the briar-patch!' — when that was exactly what he wanted most of all? Don't you see, we mustn't let del Puerto get away!"

"What's the use? Judas Priest in an electric fan, if we couldn't make a case against him then, how can we now with the trail as cold as last Christmas's goose?"

"You could —" Miss Withers started, then stopped. "It *is* a problem, isn't it? But if we could set a trap for the man somehow, surprise him into giving himself away, let him get stuck with his own story? He claimed that Maggie had a fight with him at the dock and walked off in a huff, leaving all her clothes and baggage behind. And hasn't he always insisted that she's alive somewhere, and hasn't he kept issuing statements to the press begging her to come forward? He's a consistent liar, Oscar. By now he thinks he has nothing to worry about. No doubt he has kept his spirits up through the years in prison by planning what he will do with the money when he gets his hands on it. Suppose — suppose that just as the court is about to order it handed over to him, Maggie herself appears out of nowhere to contest it!"

The Inspector closed his eyes and sighed. "She *can't*," he said, as if speaking to a child. "She can't — for the simple reason she's dead."

"But isn't that just what Juan del Puerto will blurt out when we spring the surprise on him? Isn't there a good chance he'll incriminate himself?"

"I don't see —"

"You will. It doesn't have to be the *real* Maggie, does it?"

Oscar Piper was 'way ahead of her. He held up his hand. "No, you don't!" he told her firmly. "Not even if he did know her only two weeks, and not even if all this did happen almost seven years ago. People don't change that much. Here, look at her picture. Maggie was a good-looking babe in her late thirties, a big-bosomed Scandinavian type. You couldn't possibly fool anybody."

There was a wicked glint in her eyes. "No, Oscar? With a blonde wig here and some judicious padding there?" She gestured.

"*Never!*" pronounced the Inspector. "Never in a million years! Look, thousands of pictures of Maggie Gustavson have been printed in newspapers and magazines, and we've sent out world-wide telephotos. You'd only make a laughing-stock of yourself." He sighed. "Not that I wouldn't do anything — and I mean *anything* — to crack the case. The whole thing hurts like a splinter in the seat of my pants. But that's the way it is. At 9 o'clock tomorrow morning the big gates up at Ossining swing open, and out he comes. His shyster lawyer will probably drive up to meet him, and they'll rush back to town and start proceedings to get hold of the money."

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Miss Withers nodded, rubbing her lower lip. "By the way, Oscar, just what was the exact amount?"

"Thirty thousand was what she drew from the bank the day before they were married, and thirty thousand was the amount found in his money-belt. He hadn't had time to touch it yet. A nice round figure for a lady to turn over in advance to her murderer. I imagine there'll be some court fees out of it, and the lawyer will want his share, but there'll be enough left so del Puerto can cut a wide swathe back in Mexico."

"I see. He laughs best who laughs last." Miss Withers stood up. "I must be running along. Please ask the immigration people to hold off for a few days, while I try to think of something. By the way, how long will it take for the court to turn over the money to him?"

"Sherwood has probably already applied for a hearing. It should come up in a day or two. Only take a few minutes — it's just a formality."

The maiden schoolteacher murmured something under her breath which the Inspector did not catch, and then with a vague wave of her hand she turned and hurried out of the office. It was still storming when she reached the street, but she had walked half a block in the rain before she came back to earth and remembered to unfurl her umbrella.

The rest of her morning was spent in the 23rd Street branch of the Public Library where she ferreted through mountains of old, bound newspapers, now and then making brief entries in the little black leather book she always carried in her capacious handbag. She lunched frugally at a drugstore fountain, and then headed for the subway and Newark. The Inspector telephoned her at 5 that evening, and again after dinner, but there was no answer.

The old girl was out sleuthing again, he told himself with a wry grin. It would be the coldest trail she had ever struck; she'd have to get up early in the morning to crack this one.

As a matter of fact, Miss Hildegarde Withers rose on that Thursday the twelfth of March well before the sun, which did not begin to brighten the dingy train windows until they came out above the Hudson north of Yonkers. By half-past 8 she was staked out in a hired taxicab under the gray walls of Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York, peering at the gates through a pair of 3-power opera glasses unused since her last attendance at *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Early as it was, a reception committee was already formed, consisting of half a dozen newspaper reporters and photographers who lounged on the curb, smoking or beating their arms against their chests for comfort against the raw wind off the river. So del Puerto was still news, Miss Withers noted grimly.

Shortly before 9 a little crowd of curious townspeople began to gather — a boy on a bicycle, a night watchman with his dinner pail, several dumpy women with babies or shop-

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ping bags. There were even a few private cars and a taxi. "Everything but a brass band for the scoundrel," the schoolteacher observed to herself.

At exactly 9 the gate opened and a swart, stocky man came out, wearing a fedora pulled low over his eyes and a trench-coat that seemed too tight for him. He stopped short — whether to take a breath of the raw fresh air or in surprise at the popping of flash-bulbs, she couldn't be sure. After a moment he hurried forward into the middle of the street, shoving aside the circle of reporters with their chorus of questions.

Then seemingly out of nowhere came a long black sedan, cruising so as to time its arrival perfectly, and slowed almost to a stop beside him. Del Puerto leaped inside as the door was opened, the motor roared, and it was all over. One of the spectators, a fat woman in an apron, stepped out into the street to stare after the speeding car.

"You want I should follow him?" demanded Miss Withers's driver, who had been somewhat intrigued with it all. He seemed disappointed when she told him to take her back to the Ossining station. There was no use trying to follow lawyer Sherwood's limousine.

When they turned around at the corner Miss Withers noticed that the taxi was also turning. There was someone in the back seat — a girl with a bright scarf tied around her hair. She was holding a handkerchief to her face as if she were crying.

The train from Albany was late, and when Miss Withers finally got aboard she found all the coaches crowded. When the train lurched ahead she was still staggering forward, clutching the back of one occupied seat after another. Then, in the very last car of all, she caught a glimpse of a bright scarf above glossy black curls — the girl in the taxi — and alone in the seat!

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained," said the schoolteacher to herself, and bustled forward with a new light in her eye. She plumped herself down beside the girl, who was leaning wearily back, her sloe-eyes almost closed, smoking a long brown cigarette. There was some commotion as Miss Withers arranged herself, her coat, her handbag, and her umbrella. "Mercy, it's crowded today, isn't it?"

The girl smiled and nodded politely, then blew another smoke ring. "That's right, go right on and smoke, I don't mind. My, what unusual cigarettes you use — aren't they the kind sold in Spanish America?"

"Yesss," the girl said, smiling, but only with her lips. Her eyes were wary now. She started to rise, but Miss Withers put out her hand.

"Please don't go," she said firmly. "I'd like to talk to you, *Señora* del Puerto."

The dark eyes flashed wide open. "No habla Eengleesh —" she began.

"I think you *habla* enough to understand that I want to be your friend," the schoolteacher went on. "What's the matter, child? Are you

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hurt perhaps because your Juan did not greet you when he came out of prison?"

The girl drew herself back into the corner of the seat, almost crouching. "You are reporter?" she whispered. "Or are you police, maybe?"

"Neither — just a citizen. You are in trouble?"

The eyes flashed: "I take care of myself. Please leave me 'lone, leave us both 'lone. I only come here to get my man, to ask him to come back —"

"Back to Mexico or back to you? Both, I presume. By the way, why were you hiding outside the gates in a taxicab so that he couldn't see you even if he wanted to?"

"Because — because I must see Juan alone, not when the reporters and that lawyer, that Meester Sherwood, are around. I do not like that Sherwood, he give Juan bad advice. He tell him to plead guilty so — so —"

"So the police would drop the murder charge that they couldn't prove anyway?"

"Of course they couldn't prove! But bigamy — poof! We are not legally marry with the *juizcado* and the padre; we are only what you call common-laws. So where is bigamy?"

Miss Withers decided to prod a little. "You mean to tell me that you want to take a suspected murderer back into your loving arms?"

Consuelo laughed. "You think I am his woman for two years and do not know him outside-in? Juan he cheat a little because he love easy money, but he love his neck too much to commit any murder." The sloe-eyes softened with memories. "Why, he take baths every day with perfume soap, some days twice. He wear silk underwear and always, always he is shaving. He take care of himself like a primadonna, that man. He only marry that old cow because she want him very much and she has much money. When she got mad and run away, he come back to me."

"Yes, but —" The schoolteacher seemed to be getting nowhere. "I have some important contacts," she suggested tentatively. "If you'll tell me just why you want to see Juan alone, perhaps I can fix it."

"It is because he is mad with me. He believe the police when they say they find me in our apartment wearing that woman's clothes and jewelry, and he had told me never to open that suitcase. But I swear I do not open it — never! The Mexico City police, they only try to make a better case, so they say what is not true. I must tell him that — and tell him to forget her money. I have money now. That will make him forgive me, *por Dios*."

Miss Withers nodded. "I quite understand, my dear. There are many things that cannot be said before an audience, many things indeed . . ." Her voice trailed away, and a little shiver went up her spine. She might have gone on to say that one of the things not to be mentioned in public was the weight of what might be a

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small-calibre pistol in a lady's handbag, a soft woven handbag which she had just touched with shamelessly exploring fingers. She edged a little away from Consuelo, who leaned back against the seat, staring at nothing. The lovely Latin face slowly froze into a mask, resembling some ancient Mayan carving, alien, stoic, aloof — and cruel. She seemed asleep.

After a while the schoolteacher rose quietly, gathered her belongings, and went back to the vestibule, as if in a hurry to get off. The train was already pulling into 125th Street, but before the departing passengers elbowed her aside she saw through the glass door that Consuelo was rising and going forward to the room marked *Women*, handbag in hand.

"It's just possible," Miss Withers said to herself, "that she knows I know, and that she's getting rid of the gun. And also possible that it was only a compact I felt, and that she is simply going to touch up her face before arrival."

The schoolteacher was first off the train at Grand Central, hurrying along the platform and up the ramp to secure an eagle-eyed vantage point behind the Information Desk. She was resolved to shadow Consuelo — the Mexican beauty was a new factor in the situation — and a fascinating one.

Miss Withers waited and waited, and Consuelo didn't appear. After half an hour Miss Withers gave up — who could know, in that labyrinth of labyrinths of Grand Central Station, what twist and turn the girl had taken? "I must have put her on her guard, somehow," Miss Withers said absent-mindedly to the man at the Information Desk, and went away.

Her next stop was Centre Street. She had known the Inspector, that gray little leprechaun of a man, better than she had ever known any member of the opposite sex; but never in all their association had she seen him as let down as he was that noon when she came into his office. It was no time for her to play the gadfly — he had evidently been gadded quite enough.

Oscar Piper looked up from the tangled pile of newspapers and gestured. "You seen these?"

"I hardly need to," she admitted. "They've dug up the del Puerto case?"

"Exhumed is the word. Dammit, I've spent thirty-five years as a cop, and nothing to show for it but a couple of months' pay in the bank and a stake in the retirement fund. I've personally helped send over a hundred murderers to the Chair, and stayed up all night drinking black coffee and hating myself the eve of their executions. I've been beaten up by thugs, I've had gangster lead pried out of my carcass twice, I've worked twenty-four hours a day for days on end when a big case came up, and all the thanks I now get for it is a tabloid's editorial beginning: *Police Sit on Their Hands as del Puerto Goes Free!*"

"Consider the source," she said.

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"Here's another — *Man Third Degree Couldn't Break Goes Free Today — Gustavson Disappearance Still Unsolved!*" The Inspector snorted. "I wish to heaven I *could* have that guy in the back room with only me and a rubber hose. But believe me, we never laid a finger on him — not even a pinkie — and he wouldn't even agree to the lie-detector."

"But Oscar, nobody can be right all the time."

He wasn't even listening. "The case was so simple — like ABC! It was Maggie Gustavson's own fault that she trusted a no-good she'd picked up in the park and only known two weeks — but as I said, there's no telling what a woman of her type will do."

"Or any woman," put in Miss Withers.

"But we owe it to her to see that the rat is sent where he belongs, which is the Hot Seat. And yet we had to back down and settle for giving him five easy years in the pen."

The schoolteacher had her own opinion about how easy any years in the penitentiary would be, but she kept it to herself. "Oscar, if I remember correctly you've often said that the way to solve a murder is to look for the one thing wrong in the picture — the unnatural factor."

"That's right. In this case, it was del Puerto stocking up on all those razor blades. For a thin dime you can buy a handle that makes a regular scalpel out of a razor blade — nice and handy for dissection."

She shuddered. "Perhaps. But Oscar, I was thinking of the — of the *exactly* thirty thousand dollars."

"Yeah. And tomorrow at 11 o'clock in Judge Black's branch of the Municipal Court comes up the application of Senor Juan del Puerto for the swag. Murder pays off."

"Everyone gets paid off eventually, in some coin or other," Miss Withers said softly. He hadn't quite got her point, but that could wait. "Never mind, Oscar, tomorrow is another day." The Inspector told her that she could take the Pollyanna stuff and go away and let him enjoy his headaches in peace and quiet.

She went, closing the door behind her very firmly. "But if you think, Oscar Piper, that you've got headaches today, just wait until tomorrow," she whispered in the hallway.

Tomorrow's headache broke ahead of time, shouted to the skies by newsboys waving copies of the early editions of the morning papers, at theater time that same evening. Clutching a paper still damp from the presses, the Inspector dialed Miss Withers's number. Through his mind went the many strong words and phrases he intended to use — but they were to stay pent up within him, for there was no answer. He tried again and again, until he was sick of trying. He even reported the phone out of order, but it got him nowhere. Miss Withers was not at home.

"Out riding her broomstick, probably," he said with unusual bitterness.

He was hammering on her door

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with the dawn, but still no answer. A bottle of milk, a half pint of cream, and the morning paper lay on the mat — headlines still screaming at him: *CLAIM MAGGIE GUSTAVSON ALIVE — TO BE IN COURT TODAY!* He kicked viciously, strewing newsprint all over the hall, and then stalked out of the apartment house. For once Hildegarde had gone too far with her shenanigans.

It was, as he well knew, no time to be going down to his office. The Commissioner would be calling, the press would be on his neck for a statement. Finally he ducked into a telephone booth, dialed Spring 7–3100, and asked for Lieutenant Swarthout in the detective division. "Send out a broadcast to pick up Hildegarde Withers!" he ordered. "She'll probably be wearing a blonde fright-wig and falsies. Pick her up and hold her — for her own protection."

A blank "Why?" came from the other end.

"Oh, the old girl has gone completely off her trolley. She has a wild idea of surprising Juan del Puerto into a confession by appearing in court. Now the big surprise has somehow leaked out ahead of time. Del Puerto will be wise that it's just a gag — not that he wouldn't know it anyway, since he knows where the poor woman's bones are rotting. But Hildegarde is going to get herself in seventeen kinds of trouble for impersonation, contempt of court, and God knows what else. Get going and find her!"

The lieutenant got going, and the word went out over the radio and the teletype. But that was all. As the hands of his watch neared 11 the Inspector gave it up as a bad job. For a few moments he debated whether or not to go near the courtroom and the fiasco that he knew must follow, but in the end he succumbed. Somebody ought to be there to pick up the pieces.

It seemed that everybody was there. The big courtroom was filled to overflowing when he arrived. Near the doors a slatternly scrubwoman was mopping the same place over and over again, straining her ears to catch what was going on inside. There were a lot of standees, although at the moment His Honor was only wearily passing sentence on a smallish gentleman in a sharp tweed suit who was pleading guilty to bookmaking on the corner of 47th Street and Broadway, evidently not for the first time. There was a brief pause while the bookie expressed his preference for paying fifty dollars over ten days at Welfare Island, and paid off with a smooth treasury note. Half a dozen spectators, evidently partisans, got up to go — and the Inspector slid into a chair quite near the rail. At least, he had a seat. After all, it might teach the old girl a much-needed lesson not to butt into other people's business.

"Would you mind moving over, please?" came a crisp, familiar voice, and Miss Withers crowded in beside him, beaming. "How nice of you to come, Oscar!"

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He stared at her blankly. The maiden schoolteacher was dressed as usual in sober serge, with her own hair and bosom.

"But — but — but —" he began.

"Stop making noises like an outboard motor. Oscar, you didn't think that I would actually try to masquerade, did you? But I did do a little investigating, and I found that the late Maggie Gustavson has three sisters, all blondes, still living in Newark. There is bound to be a certain family resemblance, you know. We studied her old photographs and picked the sister who looked most like her — it was Hulda, three years younger, but all the more likely to resemble the Maggie he'd remember. With a little changing of hair-do and make-up, and with the addition of some of Maggie's old clothes that she'd kept at home, I think we've produced quite a passable Maggie. Worked most of the night on it, too — we just got in from Jersey."

He shook his head doggedly. "But you can't actually *hope* —"

"Why not? Of course the newspaper stories may give del Puerto a chance to prepare himself — but it will hit him all the harder when instead of the obvious fake he's expecting he sees the living breathing image of Maggie popping up here in court and snatching the money out of his hands just when he was so sure of getting it. I wouldn't be surprised at *anything* that happens!"

"Neither would I, but it'll be nothing good," the Inspector said glumly.

"Oh, I don't know. Look, Oscar. Over there, across the room — the pretty girl with the dark curly hair. That's Consuelo, from Mexico City."

"The first wife of his?"

"She told me the relationship was somewhat more informal." Miss Withers went on to whisper the story of her train trip down from Ossining, but halfway through she was interrupted by the calling of the plea of Juan del Puerto versus the City of New York. On the other side of the railing a tall, handsome man suddenly appeared, ruffled his graying curly hair with manicured nails, and said that his client was ready.

"Sherwood doesn't look worried," Piper whispered.

"Neither does Juan," Miss Withers said. "But keep your shirt on, Oscar." The plaintiff entered and sat down beside his counsel, buffing his fingernails against his palm, impeccably dressed in a new blue lounge suit with peaked lapels and a pinched waist. He did not seem to have sensed the commotion in the courtroom when his name was mentioned, nor to listen to the brief plea of his attorney as Sherwood set forth claim to the money which had been taken from his client at the time of arrest.

"Just a minute," His Honor said. "I understand that this money has been the subject of another claim —"

"Which was dropped, I believe, with the consent of the District Attorney's office, Your Honor."

The Judge hesitated. He was a sincere-looking old man, and he ob-

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viously disliked his duty. There was a deep silence in the court. "I hear no objections," Judge Black continued. "I therefore —"

A slim young man, with an eager fox-face, suddenly arose from the attorneys' bench. "If it please the Court —"

"Yes, Mr. Nicolet? I understood that the District Attorney's office had no further interest in the matter, and had withdrawn all claims?"

"We had, Your Honor. But something has just come up. I wish to ask for a continuance in the interest of justice. There is an obvious necessity for establishing the legal ownership of this money, which was originally the property of Dr. Margaret Gustavson, and was allegedly transferred by her to the plaintiff shortly before their wedding on December fifth, 1948, a marriage since declared bigamous and therefore invalid . . ."

"Your Honor!" Sherwood stood up again. "We do not maintain the legality of the marriage. That is quite immaterial."

"So ruled," said Judge Black almost reluctantly.

"My client deposes and states that the money was a free gift, and nothing else."

"Quite right. A gift is a gift. The only person who can lawfully question that gift is Dr. Gustavson herself, and since I understand that — in spite of some wild prophecies in local newspapers — she is unable to appear, I see no valid reason —"

"If it please Your Honor," Nicolet interrupted, "I wish to call Dr. Margaret Gustavson to the stand!"

There was a moment of dead silence, followed by a muffled clamor from the crowd. Then a blonde woman, buxom yet still attractive, suddenly rose to her feet in the back of the room and started down the center aisle. For a moment the sharp rapping of the Judge's gavel was lost in the hubbub. "This court will be cleared if there is any more disturbance!" Judge Black was purple with anger. But Miss Withers wasn't watching him — she had eyes only for Juan del Puerto, whose face was turned blankly, incredulously, toward the woman who was coming forward so resolutely . . .

Did he look like a man who had gambled everything for thirty thousand dollars, and now realized that he had lost? The Inspector strained his ears to hear del Puerto mutter something along the lines of "But she *can't* be here — she can't, because she's *dead!*"

Across the room there was an outbreak of hysterical sobbing, and Consuelo suddenly stood up, biting at her handkerchief and muttering in Spanish, either thanking or imploring her *Dios*. She almost ran out of the room.

The blonde woman had come slowly all the way down the aisle, and now was passing through the gate in the railing, which Nicolet politely held open for her. "A good man," Miss Withers whispered. "He owed me a favor. I do hope he doesn't get into any trouble over this."

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"I hope *you* don't!" Oscar Piper whispered back.

The surprise witness paused as she came into the enclosure, and then she turned slowly and looked straight at Juan del Puerto, her blue eyes stony-cold.

He was standing up now, oblivious to the fact that his hands were shaking like leaves in the wind. His face had somehow lost its swart rotundity and was suddenly stark and drawn, the features working as if moved with hidden springs. The heavy, passionate lips trembled, and there were real tears in his eyes. "Maggie!" he cried, chokingly. "Maggie, it *is* you! You *did* come back!" He started forward suddenly, as if to embrace her, and only the quick warning hand of his lawyer held him back.

The humming as of a hundred hives of bees arose from the crowd, and again Judge Black banged fiercely with his gavel. Bailiffs and court attendants were shouting for quiet, with Nicolet and Sherwood both talking at once. The elder lawyer finally got the floor.

"My client wishes to withdraw his claim —"

"Yes," del Puerto cried. "It's her money — let her have it!"

The gavel crashed. "The Court declares a fifteen-minute recess, during which time I must request that the attorneys in this case confer —"

Del Puerto was beyond all that. "Your Honor, don't you understand? I am not under suspicion of murder any more! I am not a marked man, a thing of shame! She's alive, she's come back!" He was effervescent, jubilant.

"Oscar, I assure you that I had no idea —" whispered Miss Withers. "But does he sound like a guilty man? Nobody could be *that* good an actor!"

The Inspector wasn't listening. He was watching the blonde woman, Hulda Gustavson, who stood in the center of the stage in a deep freeze, an actress who had forgotten her lines and couldn't improvise . . .

And then there was the sharp cr-r-r-rack of a pistol shot sounding above the confused din of the courtroom, like a venetian blind suddenly loosed. Nobody knew just where it came from, but the uniformed officer at the door prudently threw himself on the floor. Juan del Puerto threw up his hands and gaped foolishly, then slid into a heap against the counsels' table. Miss Withers heard a woman screaming, and then realized that it was herself.

The Inspector was gone, fighting his way up the aisle through the pandemonium. She sprinted after him, like a football carrier following his interference, and they burst out into the corridor together. It was empty.

There was nobody in sight except the old scrubwoman standing open-mouthed, with a pail in one hand and a mop in the other. "Somebody just shot a man through an opening in that door," Piper yelled at her. "You saw it — who was it?" She shook her

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head vacantly, and then at the Inspector's increasing volley of questions she only retreated into a sort of paralysis of terror, saying only "Yes" and "No" to anything, and obviously not knowing or caring what she said. Finally Miss Hildegarde Withers pushed the Inspector aside.

"Nobody is going to hurt you," the schoolteacher said gently. "Just tell me — who opened that door a crack and shot through it? And which way did that person go?"

The woman pointed a shaking finger toward the nearby stairs. Piper set off at a run, but was back again soon enough, shaking his head in disgust. Neither the elevator man nor the guards in the lower hall had seen anyone running or had noticed any other suspicious circumstance. People were passing in and out all the time. The Inspector had drawn a complete blank.

By this time the corridor was filling up with people, curiosity-seekers and courtroom attachés — among them the uniformed man who should have been standing outside but who had slipped in because he wanted to hear better. The Inspector worked off part of his steam on that unhappy patrolman, implying that there was no punishment in the book which fitted this particular crime but that he, Oscar Piper, would improvise one . . .

" 'Something with boiling oil in it; I think,' " quoted Miss Withers softly. But during the interval she had calmed down the scrubwoman, had learned that she was Mrs. Mamie Schultz of 433 Tenth Avenue. The old lady's story, told in broken phrases, was that she had been scrubbing over there in the corner, had looked around at the sound of the shot, and had seen somebody running away — she thought that maybe it was a woman. There was only time for a glimpse before whoever it was turned the corner and went down the stairs.

"Now," said the Inspector, "we're getting somewhere. Was it a smallish, dark girl, Spanish-type, very pretty?"

"Maybe . . ." said the scrubwoman, hesitantly.

"Or," put in Miss Hildegarde Withers, "was it a woman of about forty-four, the blonde, buxom type?"

The bedraggled woman gaped stupidly, and then pointed toward Piper. "It vass like he say, she vass liddle and dark."

"So!" said the Inspector triumphantly.

"So nothing!" Miss Withers came back. "Perfect nonsense. On your cue, she's describing Consuelo who left minutes before the shot was fired." The schoolteacher turned full face on the frightened woman. "Wasn't there another — a buxom blonde type?" But the bewildered old crone only shook her head.

"I think I don't see no other woman," she insisted stubbornly.

That was that. The Inspector turned his attention toward the routine direction of the rapidly growing corps of uniformed men — there was

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to be a search of the courtroom and of everybody in it. "Not that it will get us anywhere," he predicted.

He was right — it didn't. One after another, the people in the courtroom were given a cursory search and then released; no guns were found.

In the Judge's chambers, Miss Withers came closer to the Inspector, and whispered, "Oscar, I'm truly sorry if I upset the apple cart and changed del Puerto from a suspect into a victim. But really, this simplifies things. There was only one person who had a motive to shoot him."

"Yeah?" he said, with heavy sarcasm. "Who's your guess now?"

"The real Maggie Gustavson, of course! The woman he had tricked into marrying him and giving him her savings. Not *all* her savings, naturally — because nobody ever saves such a nice round even amount. Savings come out to add dollars and cents — I suggest that Maggie had a good bit more, a sort of nest-egg. Every woman likes to have a little money of her own, that she doesn't have to account to anybody for —"

They stood back as ambulance attendants carried Juan del Puerto away, his face a deathly gray in color, almost the same shade as the dingy blanket which had been wrapped around his pudgy body.

"Maggie wasn't murdered," Miss Withers continued. "She cracked up — in a state of amnesia or close to it, when she found that her new husband was already married. She hid out, enjoying the hue and cry as del Puerto was dragged ignominiously back to be charged with her murder. She must have been disappointed when he pled guilty to the minor charge, but she still would have taken a deep pleasure in his suffering."

The Inspector was unimpressed. "You're making this up out of whole cloth. It's all rubbish. She'd certainly have contacted her family."

Hildegarde gave him a look. "Not Maggie. She'd risen far above them, and she knew how they yearned for her money. Look what lengths Hulda was willing to go to, just to make a valiant last try for it! But when Maggie read in the newspapers about Juan getting out of prison, when she heard the astounding news that someone posing as herself had appeared out of nowhere to contest his getting the money, wild horses couldn't have kept her away from this hearing."

Piper frowned. "I don't get it. You mean to say that you were intentionally putting del Puerto on the spot?"

"Not exactly. But I suspected that somehow she'd manage to be here. I'm afraid I underestimated how much she hated him. Hell hath no fury, Oscar . . ."

"But the Mexican wife had as good a motive, no?"

"Hardly. He had come back to her once, and she knew he would again. Besides, she stuck up for him — it was she who cleared him on the razor blade business. She told me about his fetish for being immaculately neat, and I have discovered that there is a

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prohibitively high tariff in Mexico on American razor blades."

"Maybe." The Inspector shook his head stubbornly. "But I wouldn't believe your Consuelo under oath."

"Well," said Miss Hildegarde Withers firmly, "I wouldn't believe the police under oath when they say that they found that slip of a girl wearing Maggie Gustavson's trousseau at the time they arrested her in Mexico City. Nobody lucky to have a firm trim little figure like Consuelo's would ever think of putting on clothes that would fit her like a tent. It just doesn't make sense!"

"You're up to something," said Inspector Oscar Piper. "I only wish I knew what."

The line of people waiting to be searched was dwindling now, and it was all too evident that the murder weapon was not to be found.

"I have an idea," said Miss Withers.

"You and your ideas." Piper shrugged. "Might as well let the boys finish up and get out of here."

"But Oscar — look at it this way. Nobody can criticize you now for not being able to pin Maggie's murder on del Puerto, because it never actually took place. This is really a feather in your cap."

Oscar Piper turned and glared at her. "One more feather like this and I can fly right out of the Department. At times like this, I feel like turning in my badge."

For once, Hildegarde Withers had nothing whatever to say. She tagged along behind him, biting her fingernails. They marched out in silence, out into the main corridor again. Wincing at the sight of the waiting battery of the press and the photographers, the Inspector suddenly turned and headed toward the back stairs. He was going down, almost at a run, when he felt Miss Withers's hand on his arm, whirling him around.

"Oscar, wait!"

He stared at her blankly. "Wait for what?"

"Oscar, look there — at the scrubwoman." Miss Withers pointed to where Mrs. Schultz was trudging dispiritedly along, dragging her mop and pail. "Oscar, she could have been lying! And of course nobody thought of searching her."

He was patient. "Of course she was searched — she insisted on it. I guess she enjoyed her little hour in the limelight. So —"

"So wait until I ask her one more question, anyway." Miss Withers hurried back toward the old woman, who had set down her mop and pail and was now backing away apprehensively.

"I tell you all I know — everything!" the woman cried.

"But you didn't tell us why the halls are scrubbed *in the daytime* — instead of at night, as they usually are." The schoolteacher pressed closer. "Mrs. Schultz, I have just one more question —"

Miss Withers stumbled clumsily against the pail, so that it overturned and flooded the hall with a soapy Niagara. The Inspector leaped, trying

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to save his shoes. Then he saw Miss Withers triumphantly pointing — to a big cake of soap and some dirty rags sliding across the floor. One of the rags was wrapped around a small automatic pistol.

"Mrs. Schultz," went on the schoolteacher, "isn't it time we got down to cases? *You* are Dr. Margaret Gustavson, aren't you?"

The woman straightened suddenly, her eyes widening, her shoulders squared.

"I'm *glad* I did it!" she cried out, almost as if the Inspector's hand was not firmly on her elbow. "I've been waiting for this chance a long, long time — ever since that day at the dock when I saw Juan's passport and a snapshot of that other woman. That's where he kept her picture — hidden in his passport. He lied to me — he lied, he *lied!*"

She began to laugh — shrill hysterical laughter that went on and on.

Hildegarde Withers turned away. She remembered what she had said to the Inspector: "I underestimated how much she hated him. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned . . ."

One Way to Mexico

(*continued from page 58*)

it to her. She drank. He took the glass from her hand, stooped, and kissed her mouth. Then he moved over to his bag and fussed with its contents.

"Harry!" The voice was weak and frightened.

When Marge fell to the floor he turned and looked at her. Her eyes were wide open. Little bubbles formed and broke at the corners of her mouth. She was having trouble breathing.

Harry snapped shut the sample case, stepped to the phone, and polished it with his handkerchief. He wiped clean the glass on the dresser and put it back. He picked up his bag, opened the door quietly and was gone.

Marge lay half-sprawled on the floor, her head against the seat of a chair. As the lock on the door clicked, she got to her feet and dropped the white pill into the ashtray and moved to the phone.

"Operator," she said, "give me Spring six-three-one-hundred."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ANTHONY GILBERT**

TITLE: ***Once Is Once Too Many***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Arthur Crook

LOCALES: London, France, Austria, Switzerland, and Brittany

COMMENTS: *Rough-diamond-of-a-detective, Mr. Crook — at his breeziest, brassiest, and brainiest — in a prize-winning story about Miss Lonely-Heart and the Big Bad Wolf.*

THE ADVERTISEMENT appeared in the *Morning Argus* and read:

LADY, aged 34, good education and appearance, romantic but shy, private means, no ties, invites correspondence from gentleman similarly situated. Object matrimony. Replies to Box . . .

Among those who saw it was Mr. Arthur Crook in his office at 123 Bloomsbury Street, London.

"These dear old goosey-ganders, they do ask for it," he observed to his confidant and ally, Bill Parsons. "Paste that into the office bible, Bill. Maybe, by the end of the year we can add the sequel."

As it happened, he didn't have to wait nearly as long as that . . .

No one was more surprised than Crook to find himself a member of a party of tourists going by the Scarlet Runner Coaches to the Austrian Tyrol the following spring. He had been to see a doctor for the first time in twenty years, and was shocked to be told he was overdoing it and was ripe for a rest.

"Go abroad somewhere," said Dr. Stanley. "Forget about corpses for a couple of weeks. You'll come back—like a tiger refreshed."

"Me on the Continong?" exclaimed Crook, who hadn't left his own country since he came bouncing thankfully back from France in 1918, and no thanks to the Jerries.

"Britons can take it," suggested Dr. Stanley.

So here he was, with his passport

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and currency, looking about as unobtrusive as a tiger in a parlor window, taking stock of his companions for the next two weeks. There were four married couples — he marked down two of the husbands as possible pals for a pub-crawl; a pair of ancient screamers he promptly christened Arsenic and Old Lace; a devoted female pair (Dave and Jon to you, they shouted); a manhunting young woman in her late twenties, with enough vitality in her eyes to light a whole sconce of candles; and a few odds and bods traveling solitary, whose names he never did learn. Then just as the coach was ready to start the last pair arrived, a tall thin dreamy-looking man in a raincoat and a battered-looking hat, and his wife, some years his junior but quite a way from the schoolroom at that. Crook decided she was the type you mightn't notice much the first time but would remember if you met her again. For himself, he put his money on Arsenic and Old Lace. With a pair like that aboard you could surely count on a murder within the week.

The fun (from Crook's point of view) started a couple of hours later. The coach stopped at a superior kind of roadhouse for elevenses. The ladies popped off, demanding telephone, toilet, and tea. Crook put in a modest request for beer, to be informed this wasn't a pub but an hotel, and the license didn't operate till 12 o'clock.

"I don't wait till noon to get thirsty," said Crook in affable tones, congratulating himself on his foresight in laying in a bottle of beer in his overcoat pocket. He went back to the coach to fetch it and was brought up short by the sight of one of the passengers who hadn't dismounted with the rest. She was the wife of the last-comer, and when she saw Crook she hurriedly fitted on a smile, but not quite quickly enough. He had seen her face, noted her rigid attitude and clenched hands. Whatever she had been contemplating it hadn't been buttercups and daisies.

He dropped into the seat her husband had vacated. "Shove over, sugar," he offered. "Tell your Uncle Arthur all about it. What's up?"

She stared, as well she might. "Who are you?"

"Crook's the name, Arthur Crook. Take a read of that when you've got a minute to spare." He pushed an immense printed card into her hands. "And remember, we're like the best morticians, me and Bill. We work all round the clock."

"'Linen discreetly washed in private. Danger no object,'" she read. "I didn't know lawyers undertook investigations themselves."

"There ain't many of us," agreed Crook, modestly, "and if some of the Law Lords had their way, there wouldn't be even one. Now, any little service I can render it'll be a pleasure."

"You're very kind," said the lady, whose name proved to be Mrs. Maud Ames, "but I'm afraid it may prove too much, even for you. You see, Mr. Crook, my husband has brought me abroad to kill me."

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Crook's face was like the sun bursting through a wall of fog.

"Put that one over the plate again," he begged. "You did say kill, as in murder?"

"Yes. He's tried twice already at home, but perhaps he thinks it'll be easier to engineer an accident abroad."

"Sounds like my cup of tea," said Crook enthusiastically. "Me and the chap who liked to fold his hands and wait 'ud never see eye to eye, so any little job you can put in my path 'ull be pure jam, if you get me. Tell me about the other two shots."

"The first was on a subway station . . ."

Crook groaned. "He don't sound very original. Don't tell me next time something went wrong with your sleeping-mixture."

Mrs. Ames regarded him with amazement. "Yes. But how did you know?"

"That's all in the manual for beginners," explained Crook, gently. "Tell me. Any special motive for wanting you out of the way or is it just that murder's his hobby?"

"Hobby? I never thought . . ."

"I mean to say, are you the first Mrs. A.?"

"Paul was a widower when we met."

"Any notion how the dear departed came to be the dear departed?"

"An — an accident. To a car."

"I get you. Mr. A. not driving? Such luck for him."

"But he was driving. Only he wasn't hurt. That's why he hadn't married again. Remorse, I mean. For ten whole years."

"You do it almost as good as me," Crook commented, admiringly. "Quite the hermit, eh?"

"Yes."

"Confide in you where? I mean, not behind bars or anything?"

"Oh, no — nothing like that! The verdict was death by misadventure. The jury was very sympathetic."

"I'll say. Jealous, maybe. How did he seem about the lady? Happy release on either side?"

"They'd only been married a few months. He said he was heartbroken."

"That was handsome of him. Some husbands' hearts 'ud remain intact after ten years. Know whereabouts it happened?"

"Somewhere in the north."

"About ten years ago? That makes looking for a needle in a haystack a kindergarten game. Was the lady well-padded?"

"I never saw — oh, I see what you mean. Had she any money? I believe so."

"And you? Case of 'nothing in my hand I bring'?"

"I inherited a legacy just before we met. My brother, Peter, died abroad. I hadn't seen him for years, but there was no other relative . . ."

"So you scooped the kitty. Cut up warm?" He vulgarly rubbed a big thumb and forefinger.

"I don't know how you'd regard it. About ten thousand pounds."

"Ah, well," said Crook, tolerantly. "I've known murder committed for

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less. Thought of going to the police?"

She opened her capable hands in a gesture of despair. "What would be the use? My husband's made two attempts to murder me. Paul would say the first time I had a slight attack of vertigo — everyone knows I can't stand heights; the next time I confused two medicine bottles. They'd simply laugh or suggest I was mad."

"You could have something there," Crook acknowledged. "The bulls are only interested in you about the same time as the undertakers. Now, let's have it, sugar. How long had you known dear Paul before you said, 'I will'?"

"Not very long." Mrs. Ames sounded reluctant.

"How long? Months? Weeks? Days?"

"About three weeks."

"Meet by chance?"

"Well — not exactly."

"Don't seem too sure," murmured Crook. "How was it? Hangover?"

"Certainly not!"

"Remember *where* you met him? Hotel? Bar? Party? Railway station?"

"In a hotel."

"Fellow-guests? Miracle of propinquity?"

"No. That is, he wasn't exactly staying there at the time."

"I should warn you," said Crook, chattily, "I charge for advice by the minute. If he wasn't stayin' there, was he visiting?"

"You might say he came at my invitation."

Light burst on Arthur Crook. "Why not make a pen-friend?" he chanted. "Why spend your evenings solitary and unloved? You were Little Miss Lonely-Heart, so you thought you'd invite a Big Bad Wolf to tea. Trouble with women," he added, thoughtfully, "is they don't believe the Big Bad Wolf won't turn into a domestic pet for them. All little St. Francises, there's women for you."

"You've seen my husband," protested Maud Ames. "Does he in the least resemble a wolf?"

"Never heard of the one that went round in a lambskin, havin' first devoured the lamb? Never occur to you that chaps that want to get spliced don't have to answer ads. They've only got to stand at the nearest street corner with a label round their necks and take their pick."

"He said he'd been so much alone he'd really dropped out of social circles. He seemed very nervous. I didn't blame him. I was nervous myself. I'd almost decided to say I was out when he came."

"Make any discreet inquiries as to your financial status before he popped the question?" asked the unfeeling Mr. Crook.

"We were perfectly frank with each other. At least, I was, and I took it for granted he was the same."

"And they say men are the adventurous sex. . . . Tell me something, honey. Say you was to drop dead tomorrow, would Mr. A. get your little all?"

"We each made a will after we were married — Paul said it was usual."

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Crook groaned. "Why anyone teaches dames to read beats me," he confessed. "Never heard of George Joseph Smith and his Brides of the Bath? Never thought of finding out if Hubby has anything to leave?"

Before Mrs. Ames could answer, her husband, accompanied by the "manhunter," whose name proved to be Meg Farrer, came out of the roadhouse and crossed to the coach.

Mr. Ames looked a little surprised to see his wife's companion.

"Didn't you want any coffee, Maud? Oh, this is Miss Farrer. She's traveling alone, so I thought . . ."

"Your husband's been telling me about his Alpine adventures," said Meg Farrer, in a husky voice that might have caused a West End audience to swoon but only made Crook want to offer her a cough lozenge.

"Hardly adventures. Just a little climbing on a modest scale."

"I've done a bit of climbing myself. Are you an enthusiast, Mrs. Ames?" asked the manhunting female.

"I can't stand heights," said Maud, flatly.

"And that goes for me," put in Crook, looking puzzled. He didn't generally wear a cloak of invisibility.

Maud Ames hurriedly introduced him; and then the rest of the party began to emerge, Arsenic complaining loudly about the toilet, and Old Lace about the tea.

"What on earth are you doing in this *galère?*" Meg asked Crook in her outspoken way. "Shadowing an international spy or something?"

Crook said it could be Something.

"What sort of Something?"

Crook said his guess 'ud be Murder.

"Oh, good," exclaimed the volatile Miss Farrer. "I've never been involved in a murder."

"Often," said Crook, politely, "once is once too many."

"I shall look to you to avenge me," cried Miss Farrer, giving him a killing glance. Crook felt as if a hurricane had struck him. If there was going to be any murder on this trip it seemed pretty clear she was going to be in on it.

And how right that was . . .

The party soon split up into component groups. Crook and the two husbands he'd had his eye on from the first got together immediately. One husband fished, another gardened, Crook investigated, and they all drank. Pretty soon they were known as the Three Sandboys. Arsenic and Old Lace never spoke to anyone except the courier, when they wanted to find fault, and that used up most of his spare time. The odds and bods sorted themselves out and went on perpetual shopping excursions — and why they hadn't stayed in London and gone to Oxford Street was something Crook couldn't imagine. Meg Farrer tagged along with the Ameses; and since Maud didn't care for energetic sports it usually resolved itself into Paul Ames and the manhunter going off in couples.

"That gel's disgraceful," panted Arsenic to Old Lace. "Positively dis-

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graceful. Look at the way she follows Mr. Ames round. Just as though he hadn't got a wife."

"It isn't only on her side," Old Lace panted back. "Do you think we should give Mrs. Ames a hint?"

"No," said Arsenic, firmly. "You remember what happened last year on the Dolomites tour? The courier was most unpleasant. Well, I told him, I wasn't brought up to condone immorality . . ."

"It's very fortunate for me you're on this trip," said Paul Ames to Miss Farrer. "My wife doesn't care for walking or climbing — she has a phobia about heights. I hope she doesn't feel neglected."

"She's always got the human toffee-apple," retorted Miss Farrer, who had quite a reputation for wit of this kind.

"Mr. Crook? Ah, yes. I heard he was a lawyer." Mr. Ames sounded dubious.

"He told me he was interested in murder."

"Really!" said Mr. Ames. "Is that so? How very, very interesting!"

There was one incident in France before the party crossed the Austrian border that might have been pure accident — and might not. Several of the party were waiting to cross a cobbled street and had just stepped into the road when a motor vehicle suddenly came speeding up. Meg and Maud both jumped back, but somehow Maud's foot slipped, and for an instant it looked as though she were going under the wheel. Then her husband and Crook had her by an arm apiece, and she was dragged out with just inches to spare.

When she had regained her balance, she caught Crook by the arm. "If you hadn't been there, Mr. Crook, nothing could have saved me."

"Now, come, Maud," expostulated her husband. "Don't exaggerate. I was there — and an accident of that kind could happen to anyone."

"Yes," said Maud, "but, as it was, it only happened to me. But, as you say, you were there."

Crook couldn't make up his mind if it was an accident or not. He was inclined to think Maud really had slipped, but — if he hadn't been on the other side, would Paul have seized his opportunity and given a little push instead of a little pull?

"Really, some women make the most absurd fuss about trifles," said Arsenic to Old Lace. "To hear Mrs. Ames, one might imagine her husband had tried to thrust her under the wheels."

One might, reflected Crook.

"That's a very nice girl, that Meg Farrer," remarked Paul to his wife the next evening. "Lives alone in London. You might perhaps ask her to dinner when we get back. It would be nice to see more of her."

"Nice to have her with him permanently," said Maud to Crook. "Of course, that's what he has in mind. She's fallen for him, as they say. Anyone can see that."

"I'm no slouch myself," admitted

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Crook, frankly, "but you're like the young lady called Bright, whose progress was faster than light. I suppose even a husband can be polite to a good-lookin' gal without havin' murder in mind."

"Polite is rather an understatement, don't you think? And she's very well off — she told me as much. And quite besotted about Paul. Not that I blame her there," she added, candidly. "He may not be striking to look at, but he's got something that appeals to women on sight. I felt it myself that first day. Charm, I think, is the word."

"He don't charm me," said Crook, simply. "Just a nice ordinary sort of of chap, I'd have said."

It was when they got to Austria that things came to a climax. The Scarlet Runner promoters had discovered a small village, popular in the winter but pretty well disregarded for the remainder of the year, where no other touring company took its clients. "The others," said Davidson, the courier who was there to keep the travelers from scratching each other's eyes out or assaulting the hotel staffs, as well as making sure they didn't miss anything, "the others go on to St. Anton, with the result that the hotels there are crowded all through the season. This hotel's so small our tour practically packs it, and we go on, one tour after the next, right through to the end of September. And that's what our people seem to like. Oh, well, not many of 'em speak a foreign language. I suppose it's easier if you only meet the English abroad."

"Can't see what difference it makes, seeing no one ever listens," was Crook's candid comment.

On the first morning of their stay Davidson told his charges that he had arranged two plans for the day. Anyone who wanted could go up by the ski-lift, lunch at the hotel on the top, and then walk or laze or potter until they felt like coming down again. Those who didn't want to go aloft would be taken into St. Anton, where they could waste their money at the tourist shops, buying knicknacks to collect dust for the next year.

There were two ski-lifts, one of which was out of use at this time of year; but, thanks to the heavy rains of the past weeks, there had been something of a landslide, and tourists were warned to keep away from the second of the lifts — the one not in use — as walking there might prove dangerous.

"There are boards up to warn you," Davidson said, "but there may be more rain later in the day, and you'll find it extremely slippery. Another thing — it looks bright enough now, but the chaps at the hotel say you can expect mist later on, and that doesn't just mean a little thickening of the atmosphere, it means a curtain like a fog. And it comes up almost in a minute. At 2 o'clock, say, you could be basking in sunshine, and at 5 past hope to goodness you can find your way back to the hotel."

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Ames, of course, voted for the heights, and Meg said she'd go, too.

"You come, Maud," she pleaded. "Paul says he's going to make for St. Christophe, and get the bus there later in the day back to St. Anton. I'm no Amazon, I only want to laze. So lets you and me laze together."

"Yes, do go up, Mrs. Ames," Davidson implored her. "Then you can keep her out of mischief."

There's always one fly at least in a courier's ointment, and Meg Farrer was Davidson's. She was out for sensation, and in Amiens had gone out alone quite late and strayed into a bar where only one sort of woman is recognized. If the courier of another Scarlet Runner tour hadn't happened to see her going in and remembered her — they were all stopping at the same hotel that night — there might have been a very unpleasant incident.

"Oh, rubbish," said Meg. "If I hadn't wanted a bit of fun I'd have brought my nursie and perambulator."

The Three Sandboys also voted for the heights, and the wives of two of them surprised everyone by deciding to go along.

"Spent all their currency in advance," muttered one husband gloomily to the other.

So that made eight of them going up; everyone else preferred the coach run to St. Anton and a morning of window-shopping.

The view from the heights was voted incomparable by the obliging tourists, Crook reserving his own opinion that Hampstead Heath had it "whacked a treat." He and the husbands found a nice little bar and vanished into that; the two wives found some fashion papers and comfortable chairs in the lounge and settled down for a cozy chat till lunch; Ames set out on his tramp in the direction of St. Christophe, promising to turn back if the weather should deteriorate; and Meg and Mrs. Ames strolled out into the sunlight on the gentler slopes.

"Don't forget about the mist," called Floss, one of the knitting wives.

"Oh, I don't mean to go far," said Maud, "and Meg won't be able to, not in those silly shoes."

Meg laughed. She was wearing expensive high-heeled sandals and a bright cotton frock.

"Listen to granny!" she jibed softly, observing Maud's sensible brogues and the rose-colored plastic macintosh she had insisted on bringing with her. "That's a nice color, Maud, though. Goes with your scarf."

"Paul bought me that."

"Where does he get his currency from?" murmured Meg, with an enormous wink. "Let's get going."

"Don't you girls lose yourselves," Crook warned them, en route for the bar.

"You'll be able to add baby-sitter to your list of qualifications when you get back," Meg threw after him, and off they went.

Bill had sent Crook a copy of the *Record* and when they called a halt

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in their drinking Crook opened it. It was enough to break anyone's heart. An old girl had been found propped at the window of an empty flat and the doctor said she must have been there a week; a man had gone to fetch a trunk from Waterloo and found a body in it that, he assured the police, hadn't been there three days before; a bus conductor, mounting to the top deck, found his sole passenger stabbed to the heart with a skewer; two wives and one husband had tired of their mates and disposed of them, without benefit of clergy . . . It was almost more than an ambitious man could endure. He threw the paper down and lapsed into a peevish study.

He was startled suddenly by the sound of his own name.

"Mr. Crook!"

"All present and correct," he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "Merciful Moses, look at that!"

While he had been immersed in his reverie the whole face of the day had changed. The threatened mist had come marching over the hills and was now battering against the windows like a ghostly force.

"Everyone back?" he queried.

"That's what we want to know. You haven't seen Mrs. Ames?"

"I've been a million miles away," Crook acknowledged. "How about Miss Farrer? She back?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, well." Crook sounded tolerant. "Dames have no sense of time. Anyone tried the bar?"

"They're not there. Anyway, no one's seen them come in."

"If they've got any sense they'll stay put till the mist lifts a bit. That's probably what they are doing."

"Yes, but where, Mr. Crook? The hotel's the nearest place, and the mist came on quite a long time ago. They've had plenty of time to get down here."

Crook considered. "There was that little caffy-place by the ski-lift. Maybe they took the wrong path and landed up there, and are drinking nice hot soup at this very minute. More to the point, where's Ames? Along with the three fishers who lay out on the shining sands?"

Like an actor entering on cue, Ames thrust open the door. His face was pale and damp, and his dark fine hair was damp also.

"Hullo!" he said. "I was never more pleased to find myself under a roof-tree. I say!" He looked sharply from one to the other. "Anything wrong?"

"Mr. Ames," said Flossie, "have you seen your wife?"

"Yes," said Ames, "about twenty minutes ago. Isn't she back?"

"No. We were getting anxious."

"Where did you see her?" put in Crook.

"Up by the ravine. On the edge of it, in fact."

"She can't have known what she was doing," cried the second wife, whose name was Lil. "She has a fear of heights — she told us!"

"I know. That's why I was so

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alarmed. It's curious, because she's an excellent sailor, while I'm as sick as a dog at sea, she can swim like a seal, she doesn't mind going up in a plane, but put her even on the edge of a subway platform, and she begins to shake like jelly."

"She must have lost her way in the mist," insisted Floss.

"In that case, why not walk clean over the edge?" asked Crook, simply. "Come to that," he turned back to Ames, "you must have been precious close to see her, in this weather."

"As a matter of fact, I was some way off. But — didn't you notice, about twenty minutes ago, there was a sudden momentary break in the mist. The sun came through like a knife slicing through a curtain. For a minute everything was brilliantly illuminated — everything within range, that is. It's like the landscape just before a storm — you know that grape-bloom radiance . . ."

"And at that moment you saw Mrs. Ames standing on the edge of the ravine. Did she go on standing there, when she realized where she was?"

"She was looking down."

Crook said sharply, "What about Miss Farrer?"

"There wasn't any sign of her. If I'd had any idea they were going to separate, I'd never have set out for St. Christophe."

"Look here," insisted Crook, "are you sure you've got it right? I mean, if you were some way off, how can you be so sure it was Mrs. Ames and not Miss Farrer you glimpsed for that split-second? I take it, that's all it was."

"I recognized the pink scarf she was wearing — it's a most distinctive shade; and she had on one of those transparent raincoats. I particularly remember Miss Farrer only carried the lightest of cardigans."

"What did you do?" asked Crook. "Call out or something?"

"Of course not. I didn't want to startle her. I began to make my way down, but in no time the mist had closed up again, and I had to go slow. By the time I reached the place where I thought I'd seen her, there was nobody there. Naturally, I assumed she'd come back to the hotel."

"Could be she's still on her way."

Ames frowned. "There's only one path. If she's got off that, anything may happen." He began to walk up and down the room. "I was so sure she and Miss Farrer would stay together."

"Perhaps they are," said Lil.

"Come on," said Crook, who was watching Ames. "What about the card you've got up your sleeve?"

Paul Ames turned with an air of desperation. "It's easy to be wise after the event," he said, "but I did think I heard a cry a little after the mist came down again."

"How far off?"

"It's hard to say. Mist muffles the voice. And don't ask me if it was Maud's voice, because in such weather all voices are anonymous."

The two ladies instantly became

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ghouls. They might have been playing cards, producing one horror after another from their hands. Do you remember — that woman on the moors? the man on the railway line? the baby in the laundry basket?

Suddenly Crook snatched his checked cap from a hook. "Anyone want to pass this round for a wreath?" he demanded. "What's got into you all? We don't know anyone's dead. Two girls have lost their way in the mist. I dessay they're down at the caffy eating hot soup — and don't I wish I was with them!"

A waiter came in, looking worried. He wanted to know if the other lady was back, and if he could serve lunch.

"Neither of them is back," said Floss (or Lil; Crook was never sure which was which, and sometimes wondered if even their husbands knew).

Oh, yes, said the waiter, one lady is coming now . . . and as he spoke the door was pushed open and Maud Ames walked in.

"I do hope I haven't kept everyone. So you got back, Paul? I wondered."

"How did you come in? — and when?" her husband demanded.

Maud looked astonished. "I've been back quite a long time. When the mist began to thicken I told Meg I wasn't going to stay out. For one thing, it was getting so cold; besides, you know I don't like heights, and I thought we might easily get lost." She looked about her. "Where is Meg?"

"Don't seem to have come back, sugar," said Crook. "How long since you left her?"

"Oh, about half an hour, I should think. I came in by the back entry. There was no one about, and I found a little writing-room. No one's been near me, and I'm sure I dozed off."

Crook put out a huge hand and caught her arm. "Didn't happen to lend Miss Farrer your mac., I suppose?"

Maud looked startled. "Yes, I did. This mist is very wet and clammy. I said, 'If you insist on hanging about here you'd better put this on.' I was going straight back, you see."

"Scarf, too?" asked Crook.

"She asked if she might borrow that. You don't mind, do you, Paul?"

"That explains it," said Crook, folding his big hands over his paunch. "You didn't see your wife standing on the edge of the ravine, you saw Miss Farrer."

"What's that?" The words broke simultaneously from the lips of husband and wife.

"Mr. Ames thought he'd seen you there — through a break in the mist."

"You can't have thought so, Paul. I haven't been within ten yards of the ravine. Meg tried to dare me, but I wouldn't listen."

"I said it was astounding," exclaimed Ames. "Your macintosh, your scarf — naturally, I thought it was you."

Maud sent one glance to his face, then turned away. Her own seemed to shrivel under their gaze. Crook took

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a glass from a tray and put it into her hand.

"Take this, sugar, and relax. And stop worryin' about Miss Farrer. She's got the nerve of a mountain goat."

"I want to hear," said Maud Ames, brushing the glass aside. "How long ago? And where is she now?"

The words seemed to echo round the room and come bouncing back.

Where is she now? *Where is Meg Farrer now?*

Only the two husbands did justice to the delicious lunch. The ladies had supped full on horrors and needed no other sustenance. Ames played with his food, Maud made no effort to conceal her fears. As for Crook, he missed his nice English dishes. These kickshaws were very well in their way, but give him a nice steak-and-kidney pud. or a cut off the joint, with two veg. and plenty of thick gravy. All through the meal people threw up their heads in listening attitudes or half turned in their chairs, or said, "What was that?" But whatever it was, it was never Meg Farrer.

Ames said abruptly, "We ought to let Davidson know. We can't just sit around here as if nothing had happened."

"Well," returned Crook, sensibly, "we don't know that it has. At least, none of us knows. I wonder why you're so tootin' sure there's something wrong with the girl."

After lunch the two couples went back to ground level, taking Maud with them. The two men sat about, smoking and exchanging an occasional word. The mist thinned slowly. Meg Farrer didn't come back.

The next ski-lift brought up Davidson, with a forehead like corrugated cardboard.

"I knew that girl would make trouble," he said wretchedly. "I tried to keep the situation dark, but . . ."

"You've a hope with those two poll parrots at large," was Crook's unchivalrous comment.

As soon as the atmosphere had cleared a bit, the three men walked up to the edge of the ravine. Visibility was rapidly improving as the sudden wind blew the fog into wisps and trails that floated towards the skyline. By the time they reached the place where Ames thought he had glimpsed a woman's figure, they could see for a fair distance, but there wasn't a sign of a human creature anywhere, except for themselves. Crook heard Ames take a deep breath before he looked over the edge. The setting was desolate enough, with the earth raw where the landslide had occurred, and great rocks and boulders standing clumped nearby.

Ames uttered a brief cry. Crook's glance followed his. In the bright light that was swiftly superseding the mist a patch of color was easily discernible a long way down.

"That's Maud's scarf," said Paul Ames. "I couldn't mistake it."

"It could have floated down," muttered Davidson, and stopped. Hadn't Ames said it had been tied round the figure's head?

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"If she's down there," said Crook at last, "she hasn't a chance. Look at those rocks at the bottom. They'd smash you to a jelly."

"Thank goodness Maud went down with the others," Ames remarked. "I suppose it was just dare-devilry that made her stand there, looking down."

"Suicide," added Davidson, bitterly.

But there was quite a different word in Crook's mind.

When the news was known at the hotel, all was gossip and speculation.

"Very thoughtless," declared Arsenic. "Spoiling our trip. Still, the minute I set eyes on her I knew she was the selfish type. I said so, didn't I, Amy?"

Old Lace Amy said, "Yes, dear, you did."

"It wouldn't surprise me to know she tried to climb down just to get attention for herself. She was as mad as a March hare. I said so that first day, didn't I, Amy?"

Amy said, "Yes, dear, you did."

"I don't think they ought to expect us to stay on after this," continued Arsenic. "I shall tell Mr. Davidson."

"Have a heart," said Crook, appearing suddenly from behind a pillar. "All these plans are made weeks ahead to a particular pattern; all the tours have to dovetail. You can't suddenly shift two dozen people at a couple of hours' notice."

Arsenic threw her head back so far she nearly threw it over her shoulder. That common Mr. Crook! She couldn't think what the Scarlet Runner people were thinking of. Best Tours for the Best People was their advertisement.

The man who clearly wasn't the best people went on calmly, "The Ames couple will have to give evidence or make a statement or something, once they've got the girl up. Davidson's telephoning London. She seems to have a brother who must be told."

"I daresay he won't shed many tears," said Arsenic callously. "I'll tell you one person who won't be sorry, and that's Mrs. Ames. If ever I saw a girl make a dead set at someone else's husband . . ."

Crook ambled off. He had other fish to fry. The next day he and Davidson went to identify all that was left of Meg Farrer. A team of locals had brought her up, and she wasn't a pretty sight. Crook felt sick, remembering how she had taunted him with being a bossy old nursie not twenty-four hours before. The only thing to remember, he told himself, was that she couldn't have known much about it. All the same, he had a vision he couldn't so easily put out of his mind. Pretty, reckless Meg Farrer standing as near the edge as she could get, laughing to herself because she wasn't frightened like poor Maud Ames, and then suddenly, without warning, since the mist would deaden all footsteps, the violent thrust, the stagger, the cry, and then the fall to those bitter rocks so far

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below. He hadn't liked her particularly — his cups of tea were rum old girls on the shady side of sixty, and he didn't believe any of them would have allowed themselves to come to such a sticky end; but she had been happy and reckless and alive and now she was dead and pretty well unrecognizable.

Maud Ames was waiting when he returned. "Did you see her?"

"Yes."

"Was there anything to show she knew — knew she was falling, I mean?"

"Difficult to tell now," said Crook.

Maud shuddered. "I can't get the picture out of my mind. Poor Meg standing there staring down at those awful rocks at the foot of the ravine — like the broken glass they used to put on the tops of walls, and then, without warning, feeling herself pushed off her feet . . ."

"I can tell you one thing," said Crook, "she didn't make any effort to save herself. Remember those high heels she was wearing? If she'd felt herself slipping she'd have tried to dig her heels in and you'd have seen the result. But there was no mud on those shoes she couldn't have picked up just by strolling around. She might have jumped . . ."

"You don't believe that," cried Maud, scornfully. "Why should she? She loved her life. Besides, it all hangs together too well — you can't take this as an isolated incident. There were too many predecessors before we came out here, Paul and I. And you heard him say that he thought it was me standing there."

"Oh, I don't think he had any reason for wanting to shove Miss Farrer over the edge," Crook agreed, obligingly. "But don't imagine you've got a water-tight case against him, because of what can easily be explained away as a lot of coincidences. You slipped on the platform, you muddled your sleeping tablets. You slipped again on that cobbled French road, and your husband helped to save you. You went out with a too adventurous girl, and she fell. You haven't as much of a case against dear Paul as you could take to fill a thimble. Anyway," he added, grimly, "you can feel safe till you're home. Another accident within the week would make even a mute call Howzat? And as soon as you get home, change your address *and* your will. I wonder you didn't think of that before."

"You still don't understand," said Maud, heavily. "It isn't just the money."

"Meanin' so long as you're alive you're an obstacle in his path?"

Crook knew what she meant. There are plenty of rich women knocking around looking for Mr. Right, and the best way to get hold of their dough is to marry them. But, of course, if you've already got an ever-loving, well, it does cramp your style.

"It all goes to show," he told himself, "you do better to stay in your own country."

He went off presently by himself. Something bothered him, something

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he couldn't put a finger on as yet. Sometime, somewhere, someone had said something that offered a key to the situation. On the face of it, the conclusion he and Maud Ames had reached was bonanza; but his memory itched and kept on itching. He supposed that the princess with the pea in her roseleaf bed had felt just the same. It was about 6 o'clock when he realized what it was that was tormenting him, and the knowledge sent him hareing back to the hotel. He found Davidson in the bar.

"Have one on me," the courier offered. "Praise the pigs, that's over. Death by misadventure. Even London can't give me the sack with that verdict."

"Fine, if that's what you want," said Crook absent-mindedly. "Seen the Ameses anywhere?"

"They've gone," said Davidson. "In a sense, it's a relief . . ."

"Gone? You mean, left the tour?"

"Yes. It seems some of the others had an idea she was in some way responsible for Miss Farrer's death — on account of the macintosh, see? — and were making it uncomfortable for her. Anyhow, she told her husband she'd rather they packed up, and as he isn't a tour-minded sort of chap at the best of times and wasn't going to make any trouble about a refund — which the Company won't allow — I did what I could to help."

"Know where they've gone?" asked Crook.

"We rang through to Innsbruck and by a mere chance there were two seats on a chartered plane going to Zurich that they could have."

"Why Zurich?" asked Crook.

"I don't think they cared. They just wanted to part brass-rags with the gang."

"And how!" said Crook, feelingly. "No notion where they'll be staying at Zurich, I take it?"

"They shouldn't have a lot of difficulty getting accommodations, seeing the sort of summer it's been.

"How many hotels in Zurich? Couple of hundred, I daresay. One thing, those bright red suitcases your benign company gives its clients 'ull mark 'em out anywhere. What's the quickest way for me to get to Zurich? No more chartered planes on tap, I suppose?"

"What on earth do you want to go to Zurich for? Is everyone going off their nut?"

"I don't want to go," explained Crook, carefully, "but I've never yet been accessory before the fact in a murder case, and you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

Davidson looked all at sea. "Who's talking about murder?"

"I am. Me, Arthur Crook. Don't forget the name, you might need me some day. Unless I get there in time — and the odds are about eighty to one against — there's going to be another Death by Accident, but this time the victim's name will be Ames."

For all his hustling propensities, it was twenty-four hours before Crook arrived in Zurich, and by that time

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the birds had flown. When he asked where, no one seemed to know. At last he got wind of them through the local office of the Travellers' Joy agency. A tormented clerk declared, "The English, they are impossible. They want always to take the most difficult journey in the quickest time. It would be quicker to fly back to England and proceed to Brittany by boat, I told them, but . . ." The clerk threw up his hands in despair.

Crook, who could, in his day, be a credit to Beelzebub, the father of lies, persuaded them that he was an official connected with Scotland Yard on the trail of a dangerous criminal, and thus enlisted their help. For two days he knocked about hunting them down, but though eventually he located them, it was too late. The little seaside resort was ringing with the news of the tragedy.

"Poor lady!" they said, throwing up their hands and going through a perfect pantomime of gesture. "Married less than a year. *Quel dommage!*"

There were plenty of English there, and Crook singled out a man who seemed to have his head screwed on properly, and inveigled him into a bar.

"How was it?" he suggested.

"A hideous shock," said the man.

"Not to me," said Crook.

"You mean, you expected something of the sort?"

"It ain't my idea of pleasure, gallivanting round the Continong, where I don't speak a word of the lingo, and the native's idea of breakfast is coffee and a sugar bun. Didn't happen to see it yourself, I suppose?"

"We all saw it — all of us who were on the beach, that is. They'd only just arrived, and it seems Mr. Ames suggested taking a boat out. Well, it was calm enough near the shore, though it was a bit choppy farther out, but you don't have to go out far. They sat at the next table to us in the café drinking coffee. Mrs. Ames said, 'Perhaps all the boats will be engaged.' But of course they weren't. Then she said, 'Isn't it a bit cold?' She'd want a wrap, she said, and up he popped to fetch one. A devoted couple, you know."

"I'll say," murmured Crook. "Me, I prefer the sort of devotion that don't wait till you're a nice way out and then tip the boat. That's about the size of it, ain't it?"

"He seemed to come over faint suddenly," said the other. "Annie — my wife — did say they were going a good way from shore, but the chap seemed to know how to handle his oars. It all happened in a split-second; he stopped rowing and sort of drooped, and I suppose she leaned forward to help him — anyway, the next minute they were both in the water. We could see their heads bobbing, and we thought they'd try and right the boat, but — I suppose it was cramp or something. Anyway, in about thirty seconds one of the heads disappeared. And it didn't come up again."

"And the other?" asked Crook.

"There was a second boat not too

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far off, and that went to the rescue. Poor Mrs. Ames! Shakes you, doesn't it? Mrs. Parks and me were thinking of going for a row tomorrow, but now — well, I'm not so sure."

Crook went to the hotel where the Ameses had been staying, and showed his card.

"Just say I'm here," he said. "I fancy I'll be seen."

Maud Ames came into the hall of the hotel, looking ashy-pale.

"Mr. Crook! I never dreamed of finding you here."

"You didn't," said Crook. "I found you. Too late, as it happens. You're a fast mover, Mrs. Ames. I have to hand it to you."

Maud Ames sat down. "You told me there wouldn't be a second attempt this side of the Channel," she said, accusingly.

Crook nodded his big red head. "So I did, sugar. And I was wrong. Had for a mug, good an' proper. Waltzing up the garden path like a goldarned old Mathilda. Like to tell me how it happened?"

"Hasn't everyone in the place done that already?"

"Oh, sure. I just thought your version might be more interesting. Dear Paul couldn't swim, could he?"

"He must have knocked his head on the boat or something . . ."

"Or had it knocked for him. Body been recovered?"

"Not yet. They say it may be days . . ."

"It may be tomorrow, it may be forever," chanted Crook. "Either way the effect will have worn off — the effect of whatever it was you dunked in his coffee while he went up to get you a wrap. Planned it very neat, didn't you? — chucking dust in everyone's eyes, even mine. Well, there ain't many dames can say they outfoxed Arthur Crook, but you've joined the minority."

"Are you drunk?" demanded Maud Adams.

"I wish I was, lady. But I'm stone-cold sober. Y'see, while you were on your way to Zurich I was tunnelin' like a mole — after the truth, I mean. I knew you'd given me a clue, but I didn't know what it was. It puzzled me all along — dear Paul not knowin' the difference between you and Meg Farrer when he was closer to her than me to you. And there was no sense him pushing *her* overboard. She wasn't his wife, not yet."

"Of course he never meant to murder her," agreed Maud. "He thought it was me."

"Though he knew you couldn't stand heights. You'd never even been near the edge of the ravine, had you?"

"I didn't go within twenty yards of it."

"So you said. But you knew the rocks at the bottom looked like broken glass on the top of a wall. Oh, it was a good simile — I couldn't have put it half so neat myself — only, how come, if you hadn't been near the edge, *you knew there were any rocks down there at all?* Well,

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Mrs. Ames? Come on, you're the one who knows all the answers."

"I was just repeating what someone else said," Maud Ames whispered.

"Not you, sugar. You told me that off your own bat. Besides, no one else knew. By the time Hubby reached the spot the mist had come down again. That leaves only Davidson and me. I wouldn't have thought of anything so poetic, and Davidson didn't talk about it to anyone. Let's have the truth for a change, Mrs. A.? You pushed her, didn't you?"

"If you're not drunk you're mad," cried Mrs. Ames. "What possible motive had I for wanting Meg Farrer out of the way?"

"Barrin' the fact you thought dear Paul was plannin' to make her the next Mrs. A., you thought it 'ud be a surefire way of convincin' me dear Paul was out for your blood. Then when I heard of another accident, it 'ud all be part of the pattern, and it 'ud be your guardian angel doin' overtime that made a corpse of Hubby instead of you. You were never in any danger. But he put his head on the block the minute he signed his own will. I've met the Professional Husband before today, but this is my first get-together with the Professional Wife."

"I suppose you realize," said Maud Ames, "you haven't a grain of evidence to support your tale?"

"Not one," agreed Crook. "You've only got to deny telling me those rocks were like glass on the top of a wall, and where am I? Mind you, I ain't shedding tears for dear Paul. If it hadn't been you, it 'ud have been the next designing female. Any chap who's fool enough to answer a matrimonial ad. has got it coming to him, anyway. But there's one more thing I'd like to know before we part — I hope, forever. How many other husbands have you put underground? No answer? Well, just remember this, Mrs. A. Me and little elephants never forget and any time I see a para. in the paper headed *Honeymoon Tragedy* or *Ten Weeks' Husband Falls to His Death*, you'll find me right beside you, looking out for the bride."

It was almost a year later that he did, in fact, see just such a paragraph. It read:

> Mrs. Maud Williams, a bride of a month, was killed by falling from a window in a block of London flats yesterday afternoon. Her husband, John Williams, said she had recently consulted a doctor for giddiness. A verdict of accidental death was recorded.

Crook threw the paper across to Bill Parsons. "Epilogue to the Ames case," he observed. "They all make one error, Bill. The fact is, they get careless and forget that murder's a game two can play. Oh, yes, it's our Mrs. Ames all right — I couldn't forget that face. No picture of Hubby, I see." He brooded. "Makes you wonder how many funeral wreaths he's bought for ever-lovings in his time, don't it, Bill?"

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

GIDEON'S DAY *by J. J. MARRIC* (HARPER, $2.75)	". . . a day with Gideon was, after all, not only exciting but very worthwhile." (FC)	". . . background is painstakingly accurate . . . whole tone of the book is realistic." (H-M)
DESTINATIONS *by GEORGES SIMENON* (DOUBLEDAY, $3.95)	". . . richer in color and character than the Maigret detective stories . . ." (LGO)	". . . M. Simenon's talent is developing even greater strength and brilliance . . ." (H-M)
MURDER COMES TO EDEN *by LESLIE FORD* (SCRIBNER'S, $2.75)	". . . a direct, sharply observed novel . . . bite and not infrequently depth to the writing . . ." (AB)	". . . complex . . . some enchanting and exciting stuff. Very mixed." (AdV)
DEATH OF AN ANGEL *by FRANCES and RICHARD LOCKRIDGE* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.75)	"Several fine funny scenes in Lockridge vein and Pam at her calm best." (LGO)	"Scintillating dialogue, a clever plot . . ." (FP)
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AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*
FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*
SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*
DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key at bottom gives sources.

THE COUNTRY HOUSE BURGLAR *by MICHAEL GILBERT* (HARPER, $2.75)	". . . a markedly lighter book than Gilbert's best efforts, but only minutely less welcome." (AB)	". . . wildly exciting and perfectly credible story of hair-raising events . . . Superb." (AdV)
ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT *by WHIT MASTERSON* (DODD, MEAD, $2.75)	". . . intensely compact . . . unusually rich . . . told with headlong urgency." (AB)	"Suspense well handled . . . police work interesting. B minus." (LGO)
THE BECKONING DREAM *by EVELYN BERCKMAN* (DODD, MEAD, $2.75)	"The story is strong and well-constructed . . ." (AB)	"A startling and unusual story . . . well told . . . Different and good." (AdV)
THE DARK PLACE *by MILDRED DAVIS* (SIMON AND SCHUSTER, $2.75)	". . . as either a thriller or a serious novel . . . powerful and rewarding . . ." (AB)	". . . A-1, thoroughly hair-raising entertainment." (FC)
A DIRTY WAY TO DIE *by GEORGE BAGBY* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"Highly contrived yarn is peopled by large, often peculiar cast . . . Middling." (SC)	". . . one of the more serious Bagby novels . . . lively and inspired detection." (LGO)
MURDER IN FIJI *by JOHN W. VANDERCOOK* (MACMILLAN, $2.75)	"The scenery's fine, the murders are many, and Deane's a most amusing narrator." (LGO)	"Another good item in the Murder Revisited series . . . finishes with a bang . . . Nice going." (AdV)
MURDER IN JACKSON HOLE *by MAUDE PARKER* (RINEHART, $2.75)	"Exciting and convincing, an extremely adult story very well told." (FC)	"Pleasant stuff . . . understanding of personalities; fair murder plot. B minus." (LGO)

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*
LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
FP: *Fay Profilet in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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ALDRICH, THOMAS B.: Marjorie Daw. Dec. 65
APRIL, STEVE: Two Can Play ..... Oct. 81
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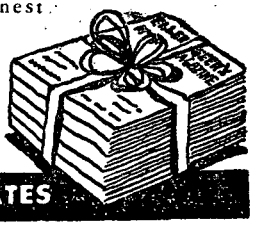

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